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Kitchen

DOWN-TO-EARTH ADVICE FOR GROWING FRUIT & VEG | KITCHENGARDEN.CO.UK | JANUARY 2016









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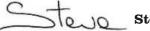
I hope this issue serves to prove that there simply isn't a time when there is 'nothing to do in the garden', packed as it is with ideas and inspiration. So shred that Christmas tree (ideas as to what to do with the shreddings on page 8) and get out the seed tin another year on the veg plot has begun!

In this issue we introduce gardening writer and broadcaster Martin Fish as a regular contributor to KG. I'm delighted to say that this year Martin will be writing our jobs for the month pages from his plot in North Yorkshire. See the first of his articles starting on page 6.

KG regular Ben Vanheems is back to explain how you can ripen your earliest ever crop of strawberries by bringing some plants under cover now and, in the year of the tomato, we celebrate this most popular of crops with a three-page roundup of the best of the new introductions available in 2016.

Finally, I'd like to mention the first of several exciting innovations that we are launching for lovers of homegrown fruit and veg this year. Look out for our new app, available via the Apple App Store and Google Play, from which you can subscribe to our new-look digital magazine. This comes complete with additional recipes, videos and much more. You'll find more information on page 13, so do please take a peek.

Here's to a great gardening New Year!



Steve Ott, editor

Contact me at: sott@mortons.co.uk | 01507 529396 Find us at www.kitchengarden.co.uk

Contact subscriptions: 01507 529529

YOUR EXPERTS IN THIS ISSUE INCLUDE:



BEN VANHEEMS Gardening expert and writer Ben specialises in promoting homegrown fruit and veg. He tends an allotment near his home in the Cotswolds. In this issue he brings you his top tips for growing early strawberries.



JOYCE RUSSELL In this issue gardening expert and DIY enthusiast Joyce brings you a simple project to turn a slippery slope in the garden into an eyecatching feature. She also brings you her top jobs in the greenhouse this month.



NAOMI SLADE Gardening writer and photographer Naomi grows her fruit and veg on her thriving allotment in Wales. This month she visits a unique garden in the heart of England's capital, where fruit and veg growing is taken to a new level.



EMMA RAWLINGS Gardening expert and KG deputy editor Emma is a keen allotment gardener and spends her weekends tending her plot in Rutland. In this issue she brings you more of the wonderful entries from our Passionate Plotter competition.



COLIN RANDEL Professional horticulturist Colin is a member of the Royal Horticultural Society's Vegetable Trials Assessment Panel. In this issue he reveals the latest award winners in the trials of swede varieties at RHS gardens Rosemoor.



BOB FLOWERDEW Organic gardening guru Bob is a regular contributor to Radio 4's Gardeners' Question Time and can be found every month on the pages of KG using his great gardening know-how to answer your burning gardening queries.

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ON THE COVER



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KitchenGardenMag

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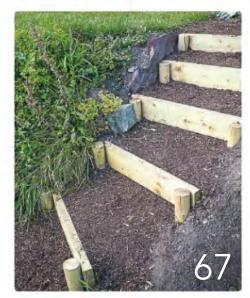
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JOBS THIS MONTH



10) MINUTE JOBS

CHECK HINGES AND LATCHES

It's a good idea to wander around with an oil can at this time of the year and check hinges and latches on gates and sheds to makes sure they are working freely. Just a few drops of oil will loosen a creaky hinge in no time.

SORT GARDEN FLEECE

For protecting young plants from the weather and pests, fleece is invaluable. It does however get dirty which reduces the amount of light getting to the plants, but it can easily be washed in a bucket of hot soapy water and hung out to dry.

CHECK FRUIT IN POTS

If you are growing fruit in large pots check them occasionally to make sure the compost is draining in wet weather. If heavy frost is forecast it is also worth protecting the roots from freezing by wrapping some bubble polythene or old carpet around the pot.

CLEAN GARDEN TOOLS

To help keep your garden tools in good condition give them a winter clean. Remove any rust with a wire brush or sandpaper and wipe over all metal surfaces with an oily rag. Wooden handles and shafts can also be sanded and treated with linseed oil.



LIFT PARSNIPS

Parsnips are hardy and can be left in the ground all through the winter. In fact some people say they taste better when they have been frosted, which is due to the starch turning to sugar. Providing the ground isn't frozen soil, the roots can be lifted as and when you need them. Where the roots are large, use a garden fork to gently lever the roots out of the soil.



CUT TUSCAN KALE

One of the hardiest winter vegetables is Tuscan or black kale 'Nero di Toscana' which can stand any amount of frost! It also stands well in the garden and can be harvested from autumn through until spring making it a perfect, highly nutritious winter vegetable. I also find that pigeons don't seem to attack it as much as other brassicas. Leaves are simply cut fresh from the plants as you need them.



HARVEST CHARD

Chard can be eaten while small as a leaf crop or allowed to develop thick stalks for winter use. These can be braised in stock or steamed to make a tasty winter veg. It is hardy with a long harvest period and it also adds a splash of colour to the vegetable garden through winter. I usually grow the variety 'Bright Lights' which has a mixture of red, yellow and orange stalks.

Top tip

To prevent the ground freezing solid around root crops such as parsnips and carrots mulch over with a layer of straw or leaves.

ON THE VEG PATCH

CHIT SEED POTATOES

Although it is much too early to plant seed potatoes, we can start thinking about 'chitting' the tubers. This process encourages the dormant buds (eyes) into growth, meaning the potatoes have a head start when you plant out in spring. Stand the dormant seed potatoes in trays or old egg boxes in a light, cool place and over the next few weeks they will start to grow. Keep at 8-10C (46-50F). If too warm the shoots will grow fast and leggy and if too cold growth will be very slow.



START WINTER DIGGING

If you dig your vegetable plot and the soil is heavy clay, now is the time to start digging over the plots. For those of you with light, sandy soil, you can wait another month or two. The main reason for digging clay soil in the middle of winter is so that the rain and frost have time to break down the lumps of clay in time for spring planting and sowing. It is also a good idea to dig in some organic matter such as garden compost





SOW NOW

Salad leaves in trays, broad beans in cell trays undercover, show onions, sprouting seeds



PLANT NOW

Garlic in pots or trays, shallots in cell trays, bare-root fruit trees and bushes, rhubarb



HARVEST

Leeks, carrots, parsnips, chard, kale, Brussels sprouts, Savoy and winter cabbage, spinach, Jerusalem artichokes, swedes



FROM STORE

Apples, pears, potatoes, beetroot, squash, pumpkin, onions, shallots.

Do it now

Check newly planted fruit bushes to make sure they have not loosened in the soil as a result of frost or wet conditions. If the ground is loose around the plant, gently firm it with your heel.

Rake gravel paths to remove any weeds or rotting leaves and if necessary top up with a thin layer of fresh gravel.



Check grease bands that were fitted to fruit trees in autumn to catch wingless female moths that crawl up the trunk to lay eggs. The bands need to be sticky to work and if they are not add a little more grease.

Protect brassicas in the garden that are being damaged by hungry pigeons by draping some netting over the plants.

Check main crop potatoes that are being stored for winter use. Any tubers that are starting to rot should be removed immediately to prevent the infection from spreading.



PRUNE APPLE TREES

Now is the ideal time to winter prune fruit trees such as apples and pears while they are totally dormant. Other fruit such as cherries, plums and damsons should not be pruned in winter and are best done in early summer to avoid fungal diseases. Winter pruning keeps the tree to a manageable shape and size and removes dead, diseased or dying wood. Pruning while the tree is bare allows you to see the branch structure. To keep trees in shape and fruitful I prefer to prune a little each winter. This maintains a good balance of older fruiting wood and new growth. If left for several years and then pruned heavily, the tree will make strong growth and very often little or no blossom and fruit for a few years.

HOW TO PRUNE

- 1. First cut out the three Ds dead, diseased and dying wood. Then reduce any tall vertical branches back down to a horizontal branch. If the centre of the tree is congested with thin, twiggy branches these can also be thinned out to open up the centre of the tree to improve light levels and air circulation. Finish off by pruning back some of the longer, new shoots by half or two-thirds to encourage sideshoots and fruit buds to develop.
- 2. When finished the tree should not look much different, albeit slightly smaller and a better shape. In some cases you may only need to prune a few branches each year, so don't be tempted to keep cutting for the sake of it!
- 3. In some situations it is better to prune out a thicker branch completely to open up the tree, rather than trimming back lots of thinner branches which eventually results in congestion. To do this use a small saw and cut the branch back to a natural fork, making sure you maintain a balanced shape.



CUT BACK OUTDOOR VINES

Grape vines growing outside need their winter prune while the plants are totally dormant, because if pruned when the sap starts to rise the wounds will bleed. Winter pruning normally consists of cutting back all the previous season's growth to the established old growth that has been trained along wires. Simply cut back the younger wood to a couple of buds or around 2.5cm (1in) from where it grew. This instantly makes the vine look much neater and helps to control its size.





Top tip

Do you shred your Christmas tree? The shreddings can be added to a bark path, some mixed into a compost heap or used as a mulch around acid-loving fruit bushes such as blueberries

LIFT & DIVIDE RHUBARB

You can invigorate large, tired clumps of rhubarb by lifting and dividing now. Lift the clump and using a spade chop through the roots to divide into several sections, each of which should have two or three plump buds.

Replant into soil that has been improved with compost and well-rotted manure, making sure the buds are at soil level.





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INTHE GREENHOUSE



WITH JOYCE RUSSELL Pictures by Ben Russell

SWISS CHARD...

Ruby chard is a burst of colour among the green, green, green of winter leaves. If plants have been swelling stems through the winter, then now is the time to pick. Take outer ones first and cut or snap them low down. The inner stems will keep growing to produce a glut over the coming months.





...AND ITS COUSIN SPINACH BEET

Some people sniff at this not being 'real' spinach but it will still be cropping heavily when the 'real' stuff is done. If that's not enough, then it's much easier to grow, and spinach beet leaves really do taste very good. You can sow seed at any time of year under cover and will usually get a heavy crop.

The secret is to keep picking and to remove any cut stems that start to rot. The heavier you pick, the faster leaves seem to grow.

CLAYTONIA/ WINTER PURSLANE

This tasty salad leaf doesn't turn bitter even when in full flower and it can be harvested over many weeks from a single sowing. Use scissors rather than picking individual stems: the more you cut, the more will keep growing.

You can sow now if you haven't already and there will be plenty to harvest from March through to May.

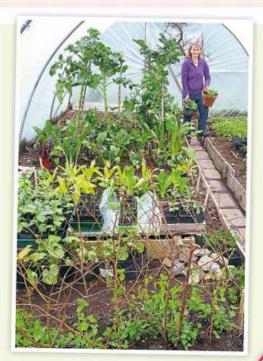


GET READY FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

The new year tidy is arguably one of the most important jobs in the greenhouse. It may not be as glamorous as harvesting tomatoes, or eating the first strawberries, but without a bit of diligence early in the year, those more fulfilling tasks might never come round.

Get everything as neat and tidy as possible in January and the rest of the year can just follow on: remove fallen leaves; dig over bare soil and dig in some bulky organic feed at the same time. Evict diseased plants and scrub any surfaces, tools and pots that you can. The chance of raising healthy plants to maturity has probably quadrupled by the time you are done.

There are good reasons why some people say they raise the best crops ever in the first year of growing and, apart from weather conditions, this probably comes down to soil health. Cleaning and clearing now can reduce the number of spores, pests and more that are waiting to harm your plants. Feeding the soil will help replace nutrients that were lost in the previous season – you can't keep growing crops on soil without putting something back.



So, get out to the greenhouse if weather permits, and feel proud of yourself for getting everything ready to grow superb crops in 2016!

TOPTIPS FOR SMALL STRUCTURES

- Cover crops with an extra layer of fleece if needed: temperatures rise and fall much faster than in larger greenhouses.
- Tie down, or provide protection for small, light structures: these can be damaged by strong winds.
- Keep everything clean, clear and tidy: there's less room for errors in a small crowded space.
- Plan the year ahead: only use precious space for plants that are favourite treats.

KEEP BUSY

- ✓ Order seeds
- ✓ Wash dirty glass and polythene
- ✓ Feed overwintered plants
 - ✓ Repair paths, edging, polytunnel rips
 - ✓ Finish pruning grape vines

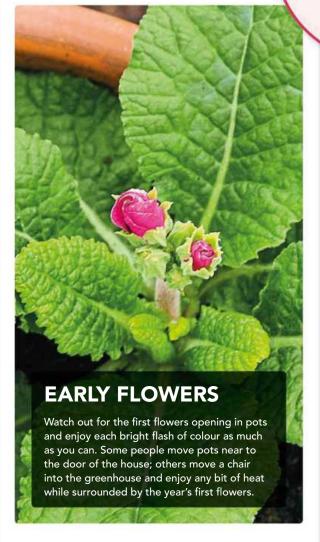
PESTS & PROBLEMS

MOULDS can be a nuisance in a damp muggy winter. Worst effects are reduced when temperatures fall to zero or if ventilation is possible. Try not to overcrowd plants and remove any seriously affected ones.

SLUGS AND SNAILS are usually inactive at this time of year, but it's worth looking under pots, boards etc. Remove any adults and dispatch any eggs before they hatch.

FROST will seldom penetrate through to greenhouse crops, but if temperatures fall seriously sub-zero then you may have a problem. It's worth putting an extra covering over crops like fennel, peas etc., that may suffer if low temperatures are forecast.

cold winds can be damaging to structures, but they can also harm crops that have been grown in a protected environment. Worst effects can be mitigated by: avoiding opening doors towards a direct wind; using wind-breaking mesh across open windows and doors; and always having an exit route for any wind that blows in.



TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Sweetcorn grows really well in a greenhouse and many people have favourite varieties. If you want to go a step further and try growing strawberry popcorn this year, then now is a good time to order seeds (check online for suppliers).

Sow with heat in early
April and plant out when
10cm (4in) tall. Plants grow to
around 1.2m (4ft) and can suit
a small greenhouse. Cobs are
small and a glorious deep ruby
colour. Harvest when
ripe and dry the kernels
before popping.



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HOT TOPICS

NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF GROWING YOUR OWN FRUIT AND VEG

SEEDS OF REMEMBRANCE

Suttons Seeds has launched one-off packs of field poppy seeds to commemorate the First World War Centenary in recognition of the sacrifice made by more than 800,000 men who lost their lives.

Gardeners who purchase the packets of seeds will have the chance to sow their own poppy memorials and at the same time raise money for the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families

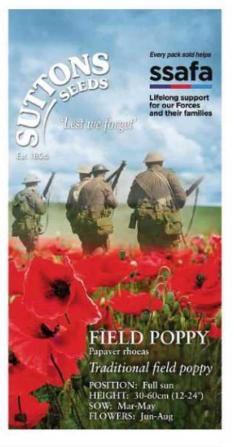
Association (SSAFA), the UK's oldest national military charity.

For each £1.99 packet sold, a donation of £1 will be made to SSAFA. Proceeds from the sales of the seeds will be used to help continue the work carried out by more than 6000 SSAFA volunteers across the UK, who provide face-to-face practical, emotional and financial support for current serving personnel, veterans and their families.

SSAFA has been providing welfare support to the Forces and their families for 130 years and is the only national military charity that was operating at the outbreak of the First World War and is still in existence today.

To purchase the field poppy seeds and show your support for SSAFA, visit www.suttons. co.uk or you can also buy from some selected garden centres.





£1000 FOR THREE-STOREY SUNFLOWER

A gardener with a lifelong passion for sunflowers has won £1000 following a nationwide hunt for the UK's tallest specimen.

Seed and plant specialist Thompson & Morgan announced the biggest ever cash prize for a tallest sunflower competition back in the spring of 2015 in a bid to see the world record brought to UK shores.

The bumper prize attracted entrants from around the UK from gardeners young and old. There were some stand-out specimens sitting between 3.7-4.3m (12-14ft), but the clear winner – at a staggering 7.2m (24ft) – was grown by Richard Hope. The Wigan gardener is well-known on the giant veg growing circuit, having held

previous world records for the biggest swede, heaviest leek and longest parsnip. Grown against a sunny wall of his house, his giant plants reach the apex of the roof three storeys up!

Sadly, his giant entry was shy of the world record by 1.4m (4ft 8in), but Mr Hope still has his sights on beating the 8.75m (28ft 8in) sunflower grown by Hans-Peter Schiffer of Kaarst-Vorst, Germany in 2013.

Thompson & Morgan is upping the stakes for 2016 and will again be offering £1000 for the tallest UK sunflower, but if it breaks the world record the prize money will be upped to £2000.

For more information visit: www.thompson-morgan.com/competitions.



Picture: Wigan Evening Pos

DO YOU HAVE SOME HOT STORIES FOR OUR NEWS PAGES? SEND THEM TO TFLANAGAN@MORTONS.CO.UK

KG NEW APP LAUNCH

Out this month is *KG*'s digital version available to download on iPads, android tablets, Kindle Fires and through web browsers. This has the same content as the printed issue but has been completely redesigned for a digital format and with enhanced features, including videos, active website links and exclusive bonus content. To sample this, all you need to do is download the app by searching 'Kitchen Garden Magazine' in your app store, or for details on how to subscribe to our digital version, visit www.mortons.co.uk/KG. Single issues cost just £2.99. We hope you enjoy it!



SEED COMPANY NAMES THRIVE AS ITS CHARITY OF THE YEAR

Thrive, the leading charity operating in the field of disability and gardening, has been named Thompson & Morgan's Charity of the Year.

The mail order and online plant and seed specialist will fundraise for the charity during 2016, helping to bring about positive change to the lives of people living with disabilities or ill health through therapeutic horticulture. Kickstarting the partnership, a new sweet pea has been launched for 2016, with money generated from sales going towards Thrive training programmes at the charity's four regional centres and local community venues.

The sale of the sweet pea alone aims to generate more than £10,000. Alongside this Thompson & Morgan is also supplying more than £1000 worth of flower and vegetable seeds to be grown at the charity's three garden project sites at Gateshead, Reading and London's Battersea Park.

Thrive was tasked with naming the new sweet pea, and called on its supporters for suggestions.

Sweet pea 'Eleanore Udall' was chosen to commemorate the late wife of the founder of Thrive, the late Rev Dr Geoffrey Udall, who bequeathed his Beech Hill estate in Berkshire, now home to the charity's head office and gardens.

Thompson & Morgan horticultural director Paul Hansord said: "We know through social media that the therapeutic qualities of gardening are widely understood by many of our customers.

"We've seen how sowing a packet of seeds and



growing the plants through the season can go a long way in helping improve both physical and mental health. Thrive does some amazing work in this area and we're keen to help raise awareness and vital funds for such a good cause."

To buy Sweet Pea 'Eleanore Udall' visit www. thompson-morgan.com or www.thrive.org.uk

SUPERFOOD SALES SKYROCKETING

Sales of superfood trees and bushes at Wyevale Garden Centres have shot up by up to 500% as consumers clamour to join the clean eating trend.

Blackberry sales have rocketed by 500% over the last year while sales of raspberries and blueberries have shot up by 300% and 200% respectively.

Eating superfoods such as blueberries, raspberries and goji berries brings multiple health benefits. Superfoods are packed full of nutrients including vitamins, minerals and antioxidants and give a natural energy boost; they are also reported to have anti-ageing benefits.

David Mitchell, plant buyer at Wyevale Garden Centres, says: "Superfruits are often expensive so we're offering our customers the chance to save money by growing their own. With a little care and attention, superfood plants and bushes will reward your efforts with plentiful crops."

Visit www.wyevalegardencentres. co.uk for more information.



TREAT YOURSELF TO 'SWEET N' NEAT'

Suffolk seed company, Plants of Distinction, is offering a free packet of 'Sweet n' Neat Red' tomato seeds for readers who request a catalogue by phone, online or in writing. This compact bush variety produces lots of sweet cherry tomatoes which can be picked throughout the summer. Growing to only 30cm (12in) in height, it makes an ideal container plant and is great for small space growing or to adorn the patio.

To get your free packet of 'Sweet N' Neat Red' tomato seeds just quote the following code: KGTOM. Contact details: 01206 307999, www.plantsofdistinction.co.uk, Abacus House, Station Yard, Needham Market, Suffolk IP6 8AS.

DID YOU KNOW? You may know that the

that the actress
Mae West
(1893-1980)
was famous for saying: "It's not the men in my life that count, it's the life in my men." But did you know that she also had something to say about carrots (or was that carats?): "I never worry about diets. The only carrots that interest me are the

number you get in a diamond."

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FREE SPRING ONION SEEDS

D T Brown's Fruit and Vegetables catalogue 2016 offers all seed-purchasing customers the opportunity to trial a brand new spring onion totally free of charge. The as-yet-unnamed variety is offered under the breeder's code TSX 8516. A free packet of seed will automatically be sent with every seed order placed from January to June 2016.

General manager Tim Jeffries says the new salad onion has much to recommend it to customers. "It has upright, uniform growth, producing non-bulbing stems with a good length of 'green'. It also tolerates mildew better than many other spring onions and is a very reliable performer. We hope our customers will enjoy growing it in the new year, and we look forward to hearing their reports on it before we decide whether to offer it for sale."

To request a copy of the fruit and vegetables catalogue 2016 visit: www.dtbrownseeds.co.uk



AUDACIOUS 'BODACIOUS'

Sweetcorn shoots
'Bodacious' are
a new growing
adventure from
Suttons Seeds.
These shoots
can be grown
all year round –
all they need is a
warm cupboard (or
similar) and darkness.



Combining a very sweet flavour with a hint of sourness, these vibrant yellow shoots are ready for cropping between six and 10 days when they reach about 7cm (3in) in height (£2.99 for 200 seeds). For more information visit: www.suttons.co.uk.



72,000 BULBS PLANTED AT ARUNDEL CASTLE

Although the gates of Arundel Castle have now closed for the winter period, the gardening team has been busily planting a record number of spring bulbs - 72,000 in total throughout the 40 acres of gardens and grounds. With such a big task at hand, the team enlisted the help of the West Sussex Girl Guides, who turned up in all weathers to help plant tulip bulbs in large Italianate terracotta pots. This year's selection includes 50 different types of tulips such as 'Lilac Time' and 'Purple Prince' with 24 brand new varieties for 2016. The walled area of the gardens will showcase 30,000 tulips in vibrant colours this spring - the biggest display the castle has ever presented.

Martin Duncan, head gardener, said: "The garden team has worked tirelessly to plant even more bulbs this year and it was great to have the West Sussex Girl Guides on hand to help! I'm sure I speak for everybody when I say how much we're looking forward to showing off the fruits of our labour with visitors come spring 2016!"

Arundel Castle will reopen on Good Friday, March 25, 2016. For more information on the castle or to arrange a private tour of the gardens, please visit www.arundelcastle.org.



Stuart Nathan planting thousands of bulbs at Arundel Castle











IMPERSONATING PUMPKINS

I thought you may like to see one of my round courgettes from seeds free with Kitchen Garden magazine. I allowed two to grow large to see how big they could get. This

one weighed 4.55kg once picked, and due to the cracked skin, I decided to use it instead of a pumpkin for my Halloween carving. The small courgette in its mouth fits in the palm of

the hand (about 7/8cm diameter). These plants grew very well and were extremely productive! Thank you for the seeds.

Tina Rea, Oakham



HAVE YOUR SAY

CONTACT US WITH YOUR LETTERS AND TIPS: TFLANAGAN@MORTONS.CO.UK

'BARBARA' THE BIG

In 2014 we bought squash 'Barbara' and grew it on a compost heap together with other varieties. We got three huge fruits, the largest of which weighs more than three stone. As you can see from the photo, it's lasted nearly a year! Soon we'll be harvesting 2015's fruits. We've grown 'Barbara' again this year.

Caroline Carter, via email



RHUBARB DOES IT!

Last year was my first full year growing my own produce from seed. Imagine how devastated I was when I lost several plants to what I later discovered was cabbage root fly. When

I later mentioned this to an experienced old gardener at the allotments he told me to put a piece of rhubarb below each plant. I laughed this off as an old wives' tale. However, when planting out my plants this year I thought, "Why not, I have a rhubarb patch, what

harm can it do?" As you can see I have had a wonderful crop of brassicas, plus I haven't lost a single plant! Old wives' tale or not I shall certainly be doing the same again next year.

John Marley, Northumberland



SEND US YOUR LETTERS - EVERYONE'S A WINNER

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SUPER SWEETCORN

You asked for feedback on the free seeds from earlier mailings. I planted the 12 seeds of sweetcorn, sent to me with the *Kitchen Garden* mag. All germinated successfully. I planted them in a 4 x 3 formation in a sheltered area as soon as they were strong plants, about mid-June, having sown them in pots in a propagator. All plants thrived, though they needed water at times as it was a bit dry here in Bristol. I harvested about 12 cobs, absolutely delicious, and all a good size, photo attached. There were a couple more cobs that ripened later, but the badger got there before me! Thanks as always for the interesting mag and the freebies that come with it!

Jo Ashley, Bristol



OH BOY, WHAT BIG ONIONS!

I am now in my third year of owning a small allotment, breaking down a soil mainly of clay. However, this year a breakthrough: fruit trees produced a massive amount of fruit, and my vegetable patch is an area I am really proud of! 'Big Boy' onions: the smallest approximately one and a half pounds, the biggest nearly three pounds! I have been taking *Kitchen Garden*, and it is all thanks to yourselves and the reader comments that have taught me a lot. Thank you all!

David Moran, via email



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LOFTY SEED HARVEST

As August bank holiday weekend was wet, my husband and I decided to start clearing out the loft. We came across a large box of old *Kitchen Garden* magazines dating back to 1999. On reading through the magazine I noticed there were still a few free packets of seeds and I'm going to try and grow them next season. Most of the seeds are in foil packets. I have courgettes, lettuce, spring onions, radish and tomatoes. I have about 12 packets. Have any other readers done the same?

Pauline Shaw, Essex

TONY SAYS: Seeds tend to have a limited shelf life, some lasting longer than others, but good luck! Will be interested to see how you get on...



PURPLE PEAS A-PLENTY

I always like to try and grow something unusual or colourful in my veg plot. This year I came across a variety of purple mangetout peas ('Shiraz') in my local garden centre and couldn't resist trying them. I hadn't grown peas before so was very curious about how they would turn out. I am really impressed with my results. The plants are very attractive and have pretty multi-coloured purple and blue flowers. They love to cling on to things so I grew them around bamboo canes and they looked really impressive. The pea pods are amazing – they have a really deep purple colour at first then they start to become two-tone green and purple. Not only do these plants look great, I have had a very successful crop from them. I only had space to plant a few seeds but I've had enough for quite a few stir fries. I'm really looking forward to sowing the rest of the packet next year!

Josie Simpson, Leeds

TONY SAYS: Great dash of colour to bring to the veg plot!



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Kitchen

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mber one magazine for growers of fruit and veg

FROM THE FORUM



MICROGREENS IN WINTER

PRIMROSE: I've just acquired a medium-sized shallow polystyrene container which I thought would be just the right size for growing micro salad leaves indoors during the winter. However, I'm wondering how successful they would be given the lower light levels at this time of year. Has anybody ever tried doing this and can you suggest any particular seed suppliers/varieties which would be worth experimenting with?

JOHN: A really good place to start would be with the Japanese greens mizuna and mibuna. These will do well in all but the worst of the weather and they are cut-andcome-again as well. I start the seeds off in small seed trays (excellent germination), prick out into small modules then finally plant out at about 4-6 leaf stage. Slugs don't eat the leaves, mildew doesn't affect it - in fact they are the perfect winter leaves for salad use! The red mizuna has a more peppery taste and a rich colour. They grow best with a high nitrogen feed and a little Epsom Salts. The leaves keep well in the fridge.

To have your say on the forum visit: www.kitchengarden.co.uk/forum

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE COMPETITION

This month the winner of our competition will receive a copy of The Half-Hour Allotment by Lia Leendertz, worth £16.99. This book shows that you don't have to be a slave to your plot!



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QUESTION TIME

GOT A FRUIT OR VEG PROBLEM? ASK KG FOR HELP



BOB FLOWERDEW & ANNE SWITHINBANK

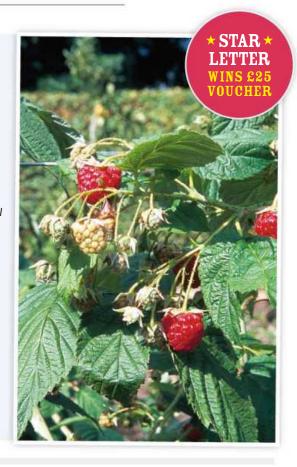
KG EXPERTS & REGULAR CONTRIBUTORS TO RADIO 4'S GARDENERS' QUESTION TIME

RASPBERRY DILEMMA

I have an allotment on well drained, limestone soil and wish to replace my 11-year-old 'Autumn Bliss' raspberries. They grow in two rows. Do I dig out one row this year, then the remaining one the following year? I cannot move them elsewhere so what do I do about refreshing the soil? What variety would you recommend? 'Polka' is popular with other tenants.

Mary Killick, via email

BOB SAYS: It would be ideal to move to a new spot. However, if you can't, then remove one row now and another next year, and replace as much soil as you can. Dig out a trench two feet wide, one foot deep and put the spoil elsewhere on the plot then refill the trench with turves, compost, manure leafmould and any organic material you can find. Put the new plants in this, mulch, and then top them up after a year. It would be sensible to put a plastic sheet barrier between the retained row and the worked-over row to stop the old raspberries creeping over. As to variety, if 'Polka' does well locally then go for it.





FERNY PROBLEM

I cut the old leaves from my ferns in the spring and put them on the compost heap. Approximately a year later, when I am digging out the compost, I find that the fern leaves have made little progress. What is the reason for their surprisingly slow decomposition, and what method would you recommend?

Janet Lockett, Suffolk

ANNE SAYS: In composting terms, brown fern fronds are what we'd classify as carbon

rich, as opposed to nitrogenrich material. Tougher plant material contains more carbon and is slower to break down. It is possible that the fronds are slow to die back and decay so they can help fuel the burst of new growth in spring. Having layers of carbon-rich material like your fern fronds might be irritating when you come to use the broken-down compost but they help keep the heap aerated and save it from turning into a squishy mess. Most of us opt for the slow composting method, as it is easier and more in-tune with how a garden yields material. To rot carbon-rich material more effectively, you'd have to look into hot composting. Material has to be moist, shredded to a small size or well layered and checked with a compost thermometer, so it reaches 55-65°C (131-149°F). After four days, it is turned to take in air and turned again every other day until ready within three weeks. Particle size will be smaller, weed seed and pathogens killed but most good micro-organisms will remain alive.

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FRUITLESS GOOSEBERRIES

Last winter I moved my two gooseberry bushes to a new spot as they were in the way where they were. They seemed to progress very well. The foliage produced was very healthy and I put wire netting around them to protect them from the birds from late winter onwards, and there was no sign of sawfly at any point. Unfortunately, they didn't bear any fruit. Is this because I moved them, and do you think they will fruit this coming year?

Lucy Standing, Cambridge

ANNE SAYS: I think the bushes might have flowered without

you noticing but the fruit failed to set and swell because the root system was not developed enough to support them. Ideally, you would have given them a thorough pruning before moving them, to reduce the quantity of leaves losing moisture during summer while new roots were growing. Watering through dry spells would have helped too. Hopefully, the plants will have settled now but do identify leading shoots and reduce these by half, then snip sideshoots back to 5cm (2in). This allows access for weeding and now is the time to apply a fertiliser suitable for fruit and mulch over the roots with well-rotted compost or manure.

BITTER CUCUMBERS

This year I grew 'Marketmore' cucumbers outside and they were very productive. Most of them were fine but a few were quite bitter. Why would this be? They did have some powdery mildew early on but they seemed to recover from this.

Peter Stockings, Nottinghamshire

BOB SAYS: With under cover varieties bitter cucumbers result from pollination which they do

not require whereas outdoor varieties do require pollination and do not usually become bitter. 'Marketmore' is an improved 'King of the Ridge', an outdoor sort and is resistant to powdery and downy mildew but might suffer a bit, though this would not make the fruits bitter. Slow growth in low sunlight conditions, and/or dryness at the roots can make for tougher bitter fruits low in sugar. Another possibility is pollination by another cucurbit such as a marrow or squash which might cause bitter flesh. A clue would be different-looking seeds.



CHICKEN POO, NOW OR LATER?

A bit of advice please. I have ordered some chicken manure for my vegetable garden. Can you tell me is it the right time of the year to spread it or do I wait until the garden is dug in March? If it should wait could you tell me which vegetables will love/hate it?

Margaret Smith, via email

BOB SAYS: You should never apply fresh or even aged chicken manure direct to the garden as it is too strong and will burn your plants' roots. Mix it into your compost or make compost from it mixed with soil, vegetable wastes and shredded paper. Once this has taken the fierceness away by rotting down, say in three or four months, the resulting compost will be excellent for brassicas, potatoes, tomatoes, leeks, sweetcorn and squashes and should be mixed in as you plant them.



WHO'S BEEN EATING MY SWEETCORN?

My sweetcorn did really well this year but some of the tops looked like they'd been eaten by something. There were earwigs in most of them but could it have been mice or birds that have been causing the damage? There were some loose kernels on the ground so I wonder if birds have been the culprits?

Josh Bridges, Norfolk

ANNE SAYS: My best guess blames squirrels, as I've never known birds cause damage and I don't think mice would make as much mess. The earwigs are

simply moving in afterwards. Deterring squirrels is tricky, because they are so nimble and can climb rabbit fencing and drop in from overhanging trees. We have squirrels and have only experienced damaged sweetcorn once, in our early days here. Since then, we've allowed a lot of trees including hazels to grow at the bottom of the garden and the squirrels seem to stay and feed down there, yet they'll raid strawberries by sucking the fruit through protective mesh. I have heard it say that growing robust, prickly squash plants between the sweetcorn deters them. Distract with natural food and make life uncomfortable for them.



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MEET THE PLOTTERS

Around the country veg growers have been hard at work and enjoying the fruits of their labours. Here we feature some of our readers and their plots

ELEANOR DAVIES FROM WOOLER, NORTHUMBERLAND

Do you tend your plot on your own?

I do the planning, planting, mulching, plant care and harvesting but none of this would have been possible without my husband Geoff who designed and made raised beds, protective cages and plant supports.

Do you have an allotment or veg plot in your garden?

In my garden I have a plot about 63ft x 84ft. There are 17 12ft x 4ft raised beds in a block for vegetables, a permaculture patch 6yd x 12yd for fruit bushes, trees and rhubarb, a 6m x 3m polytunnel, and another area 9yd x 12yd with a shed, a comfrey bed, chicken coops and 12 compost bins. My plot has edible boundaries: cordon fruit trees, a blackberry fence and a trellis for climbing vegetables.

How long have you been growing veg?

I started 10 years ago with the idea of growing all our own fruit and vegetables in a low maintenance, organic, no-dig system that would still be productive and easy to manage as I grew older. I placed my first raised bed on a grassy field

but a year later the deep sheet mulch recommended became dust mulch on top of solid clay and the plants died because their roots couldn't penetrate the ground. The next year we dug out the clay and mixed it with as much compost as we could muster. Since then I have added a layer of home-made compost to the beds every year – now we grow enough to enjoy all year round.

What variety of veg can you recommend?

Broad Bean 'Express Eleonora' because the beans stand well, are delicious and the individual beans have tender jackets that do not need to be removed.

Do you grow any veg in containers?

I grow carrots in containers in a polytunnel so that they escape root fly. I cannot grow anything in the soil here directly because plants get undermined by toads and voles. I saved four old plastic cold water tanks and gathered damaged fish boxes from the beach. They stand on bricks so that the toads can live underneath. They are filled with spent growing medium from potato sacks and tomato pots, topped off with a layer of John Innes seed compost. I start sowing in late March and when the carrots are growing strongly I sow the next box, carrying on like this throughout the season.

How do you grow one particular named crop?

Potatoes: I start with 'Epicure', planting them in individual pots at the end of February in a propagator on low heat. By the end of March they are ready to move into the polytunnel planted in potato sacks (one per sack). I make my own compost from soil, comfrey leaf mould and rich home-made compost in equal proportions and then earth them up





with comfrey leaf mould, protecting them from frost with fleece as needed. 'Epicure' potatoes are easily found near the stem and I can keep harvesting without disturbing the plants. These early potatoes keep yielding until the rest in the open garden are ready.

In the garden I grow potatoes in the beds which I mulch thickly in the previous autumn with home-made compost and leave to overwinter under black plastic. The potatoes are grown under the plastic – it is difficult to earth up the densely planted raised beds so this prevents green potatoes. I cut slits for each plant, marking the 40 planting positions with sticks and planting individual potatoes deeply.

Why are you passionate about your plot?

When I retired I spent time reading about our food chains exploring issues such as the effects of using artificial fertilisers, herbicides, pesticides and fungicides, the extent of food miles, soil degradation and waste, and the existence of exploitation. The more I discovered the more I wanted to take responsibility for providing my own food in a way that involved none of it.



Eleanor's comfrey patch



GEMMA PENKETHMAN, BLACKBURN, LANCS

Do you tend your plot on your own? My little boy sometimes helps by filling plant pots for me.

Do you have an allotment or veg plot in your garden?

The yard is on two levels, the top level measures approximately 15x10ft and the lower level is 6x10ft.

I have only been growing since June this year; it all started with a bucket and some carrot seeds.

What variety of veg can you recommend to other kitchen gardeners?

I highly recommend the 'Sweet Million' tomato plant – it can be grown in a container and produces huge amounts of small, sweet fruits.

Do you grow any veg in containers?

As I only have a yard, everything is grown in containers. I grow dwarf or patio varieties of fruit, and round carrots instead of the traditional long ones so I don't need as much depth. I have a polytunnel on the lower level of the yard which I call the fruit tunnel as it is home to everything from currants and grapes to a banana plant. Using the produce from the fruit tunnel I make jam for friends and family members.



Gemma's chicken coops and mini greenhouses

How do you grow one particular named crop?

My favourite thing to grow is beetroot, I develop the seedlings in a pop-up greenhouse then plant out into long containers. My secret tip for growing is using old coffee grounds as a fertiliser. Most well known coffee shops will give you their used coffee grounds for free, it's great for growing and helps keep the cats away too!

Why are you passionate about your plot?

I am so passionate about my plot because I think it shows that big things can be achieved in small spaces. I used to have a terraced house with a dull grey yard but with some artificial grass, some seeds, and a lot of love, I now have somewhere beautiful to grow my own fruit and veg. I also have two chicken coops with four chickens in. Every week I am able to use the eggs to make scones and sit in the garden with scones and home-made jam. It's heaven!



The veg is grown in pots and troughs

GET GROWING

JOHN SARSFIELD FROM WARRINGTON, CHESHIRE

Do you tend your plot on your own?

I mainly tend the plot but my eager grandson Declan, aged 12, comes every weekend and during the school holidays.

Do you have an allotment or a veg plot in your garden?

I have an allotment which is approximately 75ft x 25ft which includes a fruit cage 20ft x 8ft, a shed and three greenhouses. Inspired by Declan we also have a pond, herb area, small wild flower area and fungi area.



I have had an allotment for about 16 years and my knowledge of growing and the plot layout has developed considerably. When involved for a lengthy time you tend to acquire things (including junk!). Declan has helped for nine years.

What variety of vegetable can you recommend to other kitchen gardeners?

I find that Sweetcorn 'Tasty Gold F1' gives generous cobs. I use 'Sturon' onion sets. This year I planted 'Kilaton F1' cabbage from T&M which had good solid hearts and no splitting.

Do you grow any veg in containers?

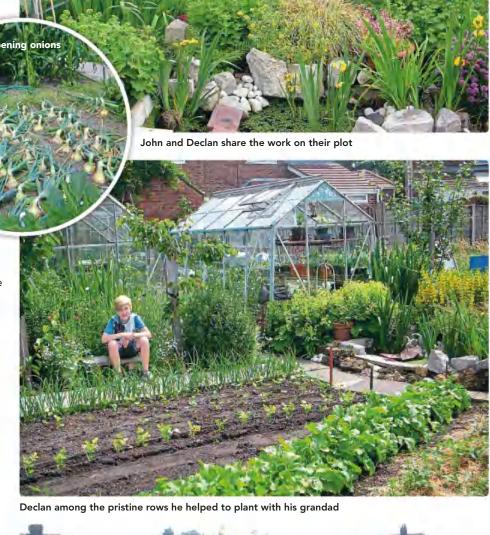
Using general purpose compost we grew an early crop of potatoes in potato bags which were small but tasty. Also radish and surplus onion sets for use as young onions in deep trays. We also grow a variety of peppers in 20cm pots on the greenhouse staging. I would repeat similar planting again.

How do you grow one particular crop?

My favourite is sweetcorn. I start them off in the (cold) greenhouse early to mid-April putting one seed per vending machine plastic cup using fresh sieved general purpose compost. They usually germinate within 10 days. Having selected a good sunny spot in autumn the ground is dug and plenty of manure added. It is dug again in spring and Growmore raked into a level surface two weeks before planting. I plant out on a generous 21in square grid using a bulb planter to make the holes. If the weather is not warm enough I cover plants with bottomless pop bottles and leave in position until the leaves start to show through the top. Lettuces can be interplanted in grid spaces. Few weeds grow once the plants get taller.

Why are you passionate about your plot?

I like to spend time with Declan. It is an interesting hobby using my spare retirement time. We meet others allotment holders, and plan things together.





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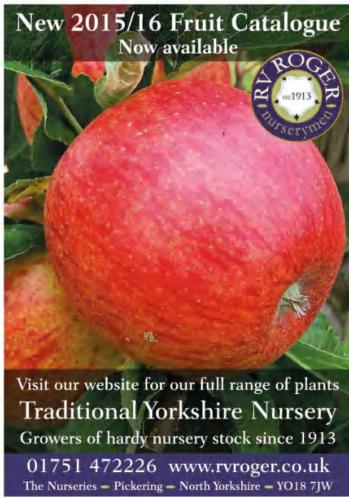
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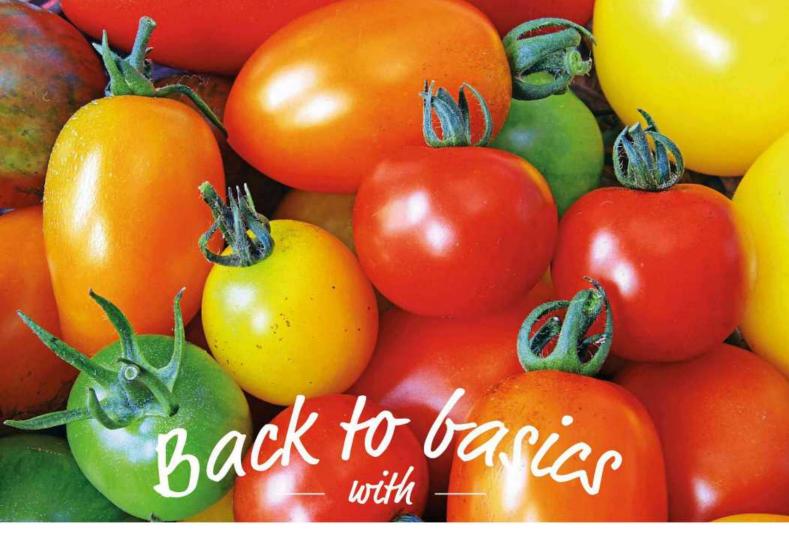


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TOMATOES

Tomatoes are easy to grow and versatile – a great beginners' crop. KG editor Steve Ott offers his top tips to get yours off to a great start this season

o crop is more versatile: tomatoes come in a range of colours, shapes and sizes from tiny cherry-sized fruits to gargantuan beefsteaks, not forgetting the plums which are ideal for sauces and soups. They can be upright (indeterminate or cordon) growing from a single stem, encouraged by staking and training or bush and trailing types (determinate or semi-determinate) needing very little training at all.

According to variety you can grow them outside in the soil, in containers or baskets, or inside in the greenhouse, mini greenhouse or polytunnel. There are even some that can

be grown in pots on the

windowsill. Everyone has the space for a few tomato plants.

SOURCING YOUR PLANTS

You can buy many varieties as young plants from seed and plant producers (see page 93) and garden centres. The early work is done for you and this has advantages in spring when poor light levels and low temperatures can lead to stretched plants (see below). However the second option growing from seed – is very rewarding and gives you a much wider variety choice including the many and varied heritage toms. Raising

plants from seed is simple too.

GROWING FROM SEED

Sow your seeds from January to the end of March, but time it to suit the conditions you can provide. Tomatoes can't be moved outside until the frosts are

over and sown too soon and without enough light they will quickly stretch.

This means that the first truss of fruit will appear high up on cordon-trained plants (the majority) and you will effectively lose one truss - a fifth of your outdoor crop. It's better to sow plants intended for growing outside or in an unheated space under cover in March when light levels

and temperatures are naturally higher. Only if sowing for growing in a heated greenhouse with extra lighting would you sow earlier.

Sowing is the same for all tomatoes. Since most of us will only want to produce a small number of plants give them the best possible start by sowing into individual 8cm (3in) pots or cell trays. Use fresh propagation or multipurpose compost to fill your pots, firm gently by tapping on the bench and water thoroughly. Make a small hole or indentation with your finger in the compost 6mm (¼in) deep. Cover

STEP BY STEP PLANTING IN GROWING BAGS



STEP 1. Loosen the compost in the growing bag by giving it a good pummelling on a hard surface - a great way to get rid of any pent-up aggression! Make sure it is evenly dispersed.



STEP 2. Cut the bases from three large pots - an old flower bucket from a supermarket or a 5-litre pot. Use this as a pattern to cut three equally spaced circles from the top of the bag.



STEP 3. Push the base of the pot gently into the compost of the bag using a twisting motion. Three-quarters fill the pot with compost from another bag and firm very gently.



STEP 4. Plant your tomato plant into the top, filling in with more compost. Bury the stem to just below the seed leaves. This encourages rooting from further up, so increasing vigour.



STEP 5. Stake your plant securely, tying in several places and water well. Continue to tie in the plant as it develops. Start feeding once the first fruit has set on the first truss (flowerhead).

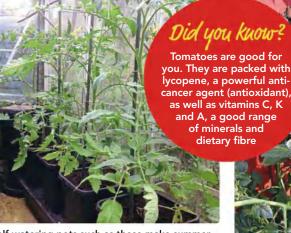


These young plants will soon be ready for potting on

gently and label before watering again and transferring your pots to a heated propagator set to 18-21C (65-71F).

Cover the propagator with a lid, sheet of polythene or similar and check each day, removing condensation from the underside of the covering. Look for dry compost and water before covering up again. As soon as your plants emerge give them as much light as possible. Once most have germinated (usually seven to 10 days) remove the covering and reduce the temperature to around 15C (60F). This ensures that the plants stay short and stocky.

Once the first true leaf appears the heat can be reduced further and the plants grown



Self-watering pots such as these make summer watering a breeze

on at around 13C (55F) until those that are destined for growing outside can be hardened off (accustomed to outside temperatures).

GRAFTED OPTION

Grafted plants offer a third option. These are plants where the fruiting part has been grafted on to a variety with vigorous and disease resistant roots. The extra vigour should encourage higher yields and they certainly give earlier crops when compared to home-produced seedlings on their own roots. They are more expensive than seeds or non-grafted plants, but well worth a try if you don't want to propagate your own or if your soil is less than perfect. >



Tomatoes are the ultimate in patio veg

TOMATOES AT A GLANCE







STEP BY STEP

PLANTING OUTSIDE

Prepare the soil by digging over to remove any weeds and raking down to a fine consistency. Add 56g (2oz) per sq m/yd of general fertiliser such as Growmore or pelleted poultry manure a week before planting. Then:



STEP 1. Dig a hole large enough to take the rootball and deep enough to bury the stem to a point just below the seed leaves or deeper if the stem has become stretched.



STEP 2. Firm in and stake securely, tying carefully so as not to damage the stem, while holding the plant firmly to prevent wind damage. Always position ties above any developing trusses.



STEP 3. Water thoroughly and continue to water until the plants are established. If any sideshoots have developed on cordon-type plants, remove these as soon as possible.

GROWING ON

You will find that your plants need potting on before they are ready for planting in their fruiting positions and 13cm (5in) pots are ideal for this. Again use a fresh multi-purpose or potting compost and if growing cordon types on a single stem, provide support in the form of a thin cane and some string or soft wire rings. Water regularly as required to keep the compost just moist but don't feed. The fresh compost used when potting will provide all the nutrients your plants need until planting.

Then, once the first flower opens on the first truss your plants are ready for planting. This should more or less coincide with the end of the frosts in your area if you wish to plant outside. If not, give your plants a dose of liquid fertiliser and keep them inside for a little longer.

PLANTING

You can now plant your young tomatoes into growing bags, pots or self-watering trays in the greenhouse or into the greenhouse or polytunnel border soil, or you may intend to grow them outside. If the latter be aware that the disease tomato blight often attacks crops outdoors and choose your variety carefully, preferably selecting a blight resistant one (see 'Steve's 7 of the best' opposite).

Planting in the soil under cover provides the plants with plenty of root room and usually allows them to find adequate supplies of water to reduce their reliance on the watering can. The alternative is to plant in containers and growing bags are very popular. Standard bags don't



contain enough compost for fast-growing, thirsty tomatoes and so we prefer to 'plant' bottomless pots – three per bag – into the compost of the growing bag, fill with more compost from another bag or with multi-purpose compost and grow your plants in these (see below).

I have also had great results from growing in self-watering containers such as the Quadgrow from Greenhouse Sensations – but there is no shortage of alternative systems you can buy for growing your crop. Simply turning the growing bag on its side or planting in large pots or raised beds offer suitable alternatives.

TRAINING AND TRIMMING

As mentioned, bush or trailing plants require very little if any training and bush types in particular are ideal for planting in hanging baskets where their long branches can hang over the sides. Cordon types (those growing from a single straight stem) do require regular training and tying in. Sideshoots will appear regularly and these should be removed while still small so as to cause as little damage to the stem as possible. Shoots may grow from the end of the fruit trusses and these, too should be removed.

Continue to tie in the main shoot to the stake until your plant has set five trusses outside, or once it has reached the eaves of the greenhouse inside. Once this happens pinch out the growing point. The plant will respond by producing new leading shoots, but remove these as they appear.

Once the fruit is ripening on the first truss the leaves are removed to a point just below that truss and this treatment continues as each truss is picked. Removing the leaves in this way allows sunlight and air to the ripening fruit, reducing disease and speeding the ripening process.

HARVESTING

Pick fruit as soon as it is ripe to encourage its neighbours to ripen more quickly. Avoid pulling the fruit or you may damage the truss or knock off unripe fruit. Instead, look for the knuckle on the stalk of the individual fruit, about half way up. Place a thumbnail on this point and pull gently upwards away from the stem. It will almost always come away cleanly. If not, hold the stalk in one hand and tug gently with the other hand or snip off with scissors.



STEVE'S 7 OF THE BEST TOMATOES













There are hundreds of varieties available, (see page 48 for our roundup of the best new ones for 2016). Here is a selection of my favourites.

BEST FOR BASKETS:

'Tumbling Tom': a reliable basket type which produces heavy yields of cherry-sized fruits. Available in red or vellow versions. Outdoors in a basket or pot on the patio. Bush type. Suttons, Marshalls

BEST FOR BLIGHT:

'Crimson Crush': a very new medium to large-sized variety with a great flavour and disease resistance. Available as grafted plants or seeds. Outdoors but also does well inside. Cordon.

BEST MEDIUM-SIZED FRUIT:

'Moneymaker': okay, there are probably newer and better varieties, but I used to grow this one as a kid with my father and still love it in sandwiches, salads and to make sauces. Indoors or out Cordon T&M

BEST CHERRY TOM:

'Sungold F1': the very sweet orange fruits are produced in abundance. Cordon type. Indoors or out. Widely available.

BEST BEEFSTEAK:

'Marmande': an awardwinning variety that fruits early and has great flavour. Semi-determinate which means it may need some support, but little training. Indoors or out. D T Brown, Seeds of Italy

BEST FOR THE WINDOWSILL:

'Sweet 'N' Neat': produces dwarf plants that are ideal for pots or small baskets. Small red fruit are sweet and delicious. Yellow variety

also available. Indoors or out. Bush type. Plants of Distinction 'Sweet 'N' Neat'

BEST FOR SAUCES:

'Roma': an old Italian variety that is great for making pasta and pizza sauces and soups. Semi-determinate which means it needs some support, but little training. Indoors or out. Seeds of Italy, D T Brown



PESTS & DISEASES

TOMATO BLIGHT: This is a devastating disease which is especially common on outdoor crops. Although it will certainly attack plants grown indoors, the spores are usually kept at bay to some extent by the glass or polythene. Choose a blight resistant variety. The most resistant at the moment include 'Crimson Crush' (Suttons) and 'Mountain Magic' (T&M).

WHITEFLY: This little white moth feeds on the undersides of the leaf and in large numbers can reduce vigour and, thanks to the honeydew it excretes over the fruit, causes cosmetic damage, too. Use sticky yellow traps soon after planting and introduce encarsia biological control as soon as you spot an individual whitefly.

BOTRYTIS (GREY MOULD): Usually more of a problem late in the season. Ventilate the greenhouse well and remove old leaves and fallen/damaged

fruit. Do not leave stubs when pruning out sideshoots or deleafing. Also causes cosmetic 'ghost spotting' on the fruit.

as the problem is seen.

RED SPIDER MITE: More of a problem under cover. this tiny pest is hard to spot but gives the leaves a peppered appearance. You may also see fine webbing under the leaves. Introduce phytoseiulus biological control as soon

BLOSSOM END ROT: The blossom end of mainly greenhouse-grown fruit turns black and sunken. The rest of the fruit may still be edible. Caused by uneven watering. Water regularly or consider self-watering trays or irrigation.



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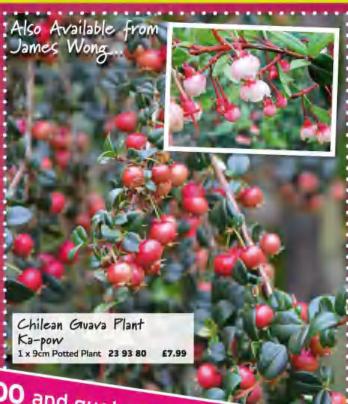
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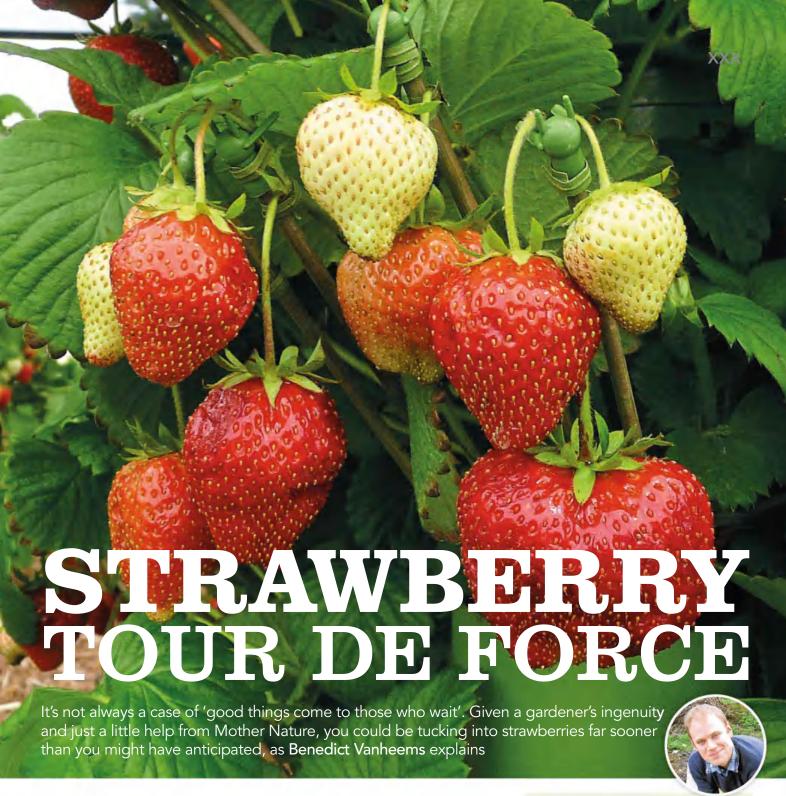








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s there anything quite as luxurious as sinking your teeth into a soft, sunwarmed home-grown strawberry? Its intoxicatingly sweet aroma, luscious flesh and sensational taste make the strawberry a truly heavenly experience!

We all know that to enjoy a full season of this must-grow fruit you have to plant a mix of early, mid and late-season varieties. By doing this the wise gardener ensures there's something to pick from June to as late as October. The commercial strawberry season, however, starts as soon as the first week of May, when the first punnets of British-grown strawbs hit the shelves. What's their secret? How do they produce berries a whole month ahead of the rest of us?

Well, the secret lies in the right combination of vigorous early varieties, gentle heat and just a little sunshine.

HOW TO FORCE

Forcing – that is, encouraging a plant to produce a harvest earlier than it would naturally do so – is an age-old technique that works a dream with strawberries. It's easy to do and, with a bit of luck, you'll be snaffling your own fruits as soon as mid-May, just in time for the Chelsea Flower Show and the start of the Great British social season!

Enjoying strawberries in May starts with the right early varieties. Typical early risers include heavy-cropping 'Honeoye', super-sweet and aromatic 'Gariguette' and the easy-to-grow Dutch variety 'Korona', which produces massive, rich-red berries of exceptional flavour. There are, of course, many other suitable varieties to choose from, so it's worth exploring the early cultivars to find one that strikes the right balance between taste and haste.

METEORIC INCREASE

Just 25 years ago the British strawberry season was a paltry six weeks – blink and you'd miss it! Today's modern varieties and growing techniques have more than tripled the season to an incredible 20 weeks, making the industry worth more than £300m. Over the past five years alone commercial production has increased by more than a third to around 75,000 tonnes. And the reason behind the meteoric increase? The polytunnel – in 1990 they weren't used, while today around 95% of berries are grown under them.

www.kitchengarden.co.uk JANUARY 2016 | **33**

GET GROWING





Make sure insects can either reach flowers or step in yourself to pollinate by hand instead

The simplest way to force strawberries is to cover outdoor-grown plants with cloches or hoop tunnels covered in polythene. This alone will shift the growing season forward by at least a fortnight, tricking the plants into thinking spring has arrived and it's time to get flowering and fruiting. Covers and cloches can be added from February, by which time the plants will have had a good period of the chilling necessary to set them up for the new growing season.

UNDERCOVER PLANTS

Alternatively, use rooted runners potted up from the previous year, or dig up plants and pot them up into containers of multi-purpose compost. One-year-old to two-year-old plants are the most vigorous and therefore give the best results when forcing.



This ingenious set-up uses a wooden A-frame plant theatre and growing bags to maximise space and light in the greenhouse

Plants in pots can be brought under the cover of a greenhouse, which offers an even greater degree of protection than a cloche. In a cold greenhouse you can expect to cheat the season by as much as three weeks, while a heated greenhouse – or section of a greenhouse – will shift spring forward by a whole month, offering the tempting prospect of strawberries as early as May Day.

There's some spring cleaning to be done before covering plants over or bringing them under cover — they want to look their best for their big performance! Cut away any dead, diseased or otherwise mouldy-looking leaves then snip off any runners that have formed so that the plants can concentrate their energies on flowering and fruiting. Outside plants will benefit from a top dressing of organic

STEP BY STEP

HOW TO RAISE PLANTS FROM RUNNERS



STEP 1. Runners are an easy – and free – way to propagate new strawberry plants. Select runners from healthy, disease-free plants. If you want to keep the original plants, limit the number of runners to five per plant.



STEP 2. Each runner will already be producing tiny roots at the plantlet. Simply pin these plantlets down on to soil or pots of compost. Use a hairpin or lengths of wire bent into a U-shape.



STEP 3. Keep watered and allow the plantlet to root into the compost or soil. After four to six weeks it should have done so, at which point the plantlet can be cut away from the parent plant.



STEP 4. You can allow the new plant to grow on where it is or, if you prefer, you can dig it up and plant it out or repot it elsewhere. The plant should produce flowers and fruit during the next growing season.

It's not unusual to have strawberries in full fruit as tender crops are only just getting into their stride!

SEEING RED

Want bigger, tastier strawberries – and more of them? Then plant them through a mulch of red plastic sheeting. US studies have shown that the light reflected from the red plastic mimics light conditions experienced when plants are surrounded by weeds. The perceived competition for available resources encourages plants to ramp up fruit production in an effort to outcompete the weeds. As a result, total yields can increase by a remarkable 20%.



mulch, garden-made compost or well-rotted manure is ideal.

ENCOURAGE FRUIT SET

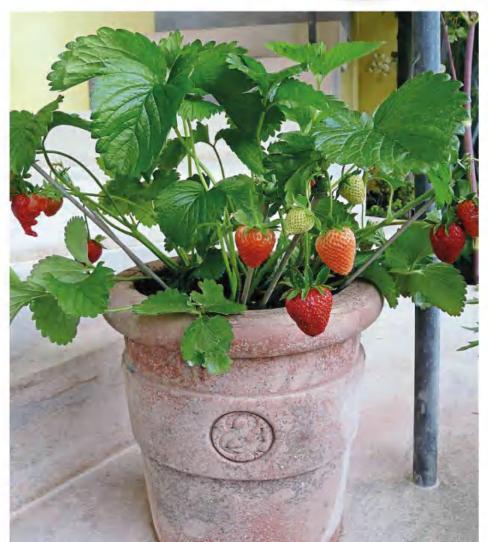
As soon as your early risers come into flower it's game on: you're just a few weeks away from your prized strawbs! At this stage you can give plants additional strength by feeding them once a week with a liquid feed that's high in potash – any tomato feed will do.

Pollinators can be few and far between early on in spring, which can make pollination something of a hit-and-miss affair. Outdoor strawberries, under cloches, should have covers removed on warm, sunny days to allow bees and other pollinators easy access. Cover plants back over before nightfall, so that the heat from the day is trapped.

Plants in greenhouses or polytunnels need special treatment. Use a soft artist's paintbrush to gently tickle the centre of each open flower, moving from flower to flower to mimic the buzz pollination of a bee. Do this once a day, or at least every other day, and your blooms should see successful pollination and fruit set.

SPEEDY GROWTH

Strawberry plants grown in a greenhouse or polytunnel will need to be kept well-ventilated to avoid the potential of a build-up of fungal diseases. Open all vents and doors on warm days, ideally keeping maximum temperatures to 24°C (75°F), which should be easily achieved on all but the hottest days.





HOW TO STORE STRAWBERRIES

Berries are always best picked moments before eating. Pick them during the day and the warmth from the sun will have brought out their aroma, ensuring the best eating experience. If you do need to pick ahead, store your fruits at room temperature and not in the fridge, which dramatically reduces flavour. Storing at around 20°C (68°F) sees fragrance, colour and even antioxidant content enhanced.

Red spider mites are a common pest of crops growing in a warm, dry atmosphere such as that found in some greenhouses. The tiny mites suck sap from leaves, including strawberries, weakening plants and leading to a substandard harvest. You can make conditions hostile to spider mites by keeping compost moist and, on particularly hot days, damping down the greenhouse floor to raise the relative humidity.

AFTERCARE

Forced strawberry plants will be exhausted after their early start (think how you feel after getting up for a crack-of-dawn flight!). Don't force these poor plants again next year - just plant them back outside or into containers of fresh compost to grow them on as normal. For maximum productivity, however, you are best retiring them to the compost heap and replanting afresh.

Like any aspect of kitchen gardening, a little planning goes a long way. Aim to have a continuous succession of plants raised specifically for forcing, alongside additional early, mid and late-season varieties grown in the conventional way. With luck you'll be cropping like the pros, sampling your own sensational strawbs from May to early October.

SEE THE VIDEO ON

IPAD/ANDROID TABLETS

STEP BY STEP HOW TO FORCE STRAWBERRIES



STEP 1. Force strawberry plants from February onwards by which time plants will have had their necessary chilling period. Outdoor plants can simply be covered with a cloche.



STEP 2. Alternatively place potted-up plants into a cold frame. Pollination can be poor early on in the spring, so prop open the lights during the day so that insects can gain access.



STEP 3. Plants may also be planted up under cover into growing bags, which offer a convenient and immediate home. As plants come into flower use a soft paintbrush to pollinate them.

STEP 4. Like any fruiting crop, keep on picking the fruits as they ripen to encourage more to follow. Enjoy them fresh or store at room temperature to use within three to four days.

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veg at a glauce

CORTICIES

Cornichons, gherkins, dill pickles, call them what you will – these little cucumbers are easy to grow and great for preserving. Steve Ott explains how to grow them without getting into a pickle

traditional fish and chip supper or a tasty burger just isn't the same without a few pickled gherkins, or cornichons as an accompaniment. They will be familiar to most in their pickled form, but they are really just baby cucumbers (although ones bred to be picked young) and are equally good eaten straight from the plant in salads.

CROP REQUIREMENTS

If you can grow outdoor ridge cucumbers on your plot, you should be able to grow gherkins equally well. These trailing plants can either be grown along the ground, preferably on a layer of black polythene to keep the fruit clean and the soil warm, or trained up a wigwam or netting. They do require a warm summer to do really well outside so if you garden

in a northern or exposed area you might consider growing them in frames or in a cold greenhouse or polytunnel instead.

STARTING YOUR CROP

This frost-tender crop is best sown with a view to having established young plants ready to move on when the last frost has passed. In the East Midlands we sow from late March to have plants to go out from the beginning of June. If you sow tender crops for growing outside such as tomatoes or ridge cucumbers then use the same timing for your gherkins. If you don't have a propagator, delay sowing until April or May; it is also possible to sow the seeds direct into the soil where plants are to grow in June.

Sow one seed into a small pot or cell tray which has been filled with any fresh multipurpose or sowing compost. Bury the seeds 6mm (¼in) deep, covering carefully and watering in well. Place in a heated propagator set to 18-21°C (65-70°F) and cover with a lid or sheet of glass until germination takes place usually seven to 10 days.

TOP TIP

Keep gherkins and all female cucumbers separate to prevent cross pollination and bitter cucumbers



VARIETY CHOICE

- 'DIAMANT F1': Heavy crops of small fruit. Good tolerance to downy and powdery mildews. (T&M)
- 'PARTNER': Early cropping and producing lots of tasty, short fruits. Good disease resistance. (Marshalls)
- 'VENLO PICKLING': Good flavour. Ideal for salads or for pickling. (Suttons)
- 'CORNICHON DE PARIS': French heirloom variety. Heavy yielding, producing masses of little fruits ideal for pickling. (Mr Fothergill's, Suttons, Seeds of Italy).
- 'BIANCO WHITE': A pale-fruited Italian heirloom variety. (Seeds of Italy).

Remove the cover once the seeds have germinated. Once the first true leaf (the one that appears after the seed leaves) is developing, remove the plants from the propagator and place on the greenhouse bench or keep in a sunny windowsill to grow on at a temperature of 10-13°C (50-55°F). If on a windowsill, turn the plants each day to encourage even growth.

GROWING ON

Maintain watering and supply each plant with a thin cane to support the stem. A week before planting out, harden your plants off thoroughly by moving them outside during the day when conditions allow, and back inside at night if frost threatens until they become used to life outside. Alternatively, put your plants into a cold frame and open the lid during the day and close it at night.

SOIL PREPARATION

it on top of each mound. If you

are going to grow your plants up a

support you can dispense with the

polythene, but it is a good idea to put

your supports in place before planting.

Choose a sunny, sheltered site in which to grow your plants outside and a few weeks before planting out dig a large hole for each plant, allowing 90cm (3ft) between them. Mix plenty of well-rotted manure or garden compost into the excavated soil. Refill to give a low mound into which your plant can be planted. This will improve drainage around the main stem and reduce the risk of stem and root rots. A week prior to planting dress the soil with 56g (2oz) per sq m/yd of pelleted chicken manure or Growmore and gently rake into the surface. If intending to allow your plants to trail, cover the soil with black polythene (or you could use white to reflect the sunlight back on to the plants) and cut crossed slits into

In the kitchen

■ Eat the fruit fresh in salads or of course they are ideal for pickling. To pickle simply place them in a bowl and sprinkle generously with salt, leaving overnight. Rinse thoroughly before slicing large fruit with a knife or mandoline (small fruits can be left whole).

■ In the meantime prepare the vinegar by boiling white vinegar — a tablespoon of pickling spice to each 500ml of vinegar. Bring to the boil for two minutes and remove from the heat. You can experiment here with your own blend of spices, tarragon, garlic, onion, fresh dill or dill seeds and chilli. Pack sterilised jars with the fruit, pour over the hot spiced vinegar to cover the contents and seal the jars straight away. If you prefer a sweet pickle, add 200g sugar to the vinegar (or to taste) before boiling. Label your jars with a date and use them in rotation within two years of pickling.

Plant to the level of the compost through the cross in the polythene where applicable and firm gently before watering, taking care at all times not to damage the stem.



Cornichons grow well in pots – 25cm (10in) or larger are ideal and most composts are suitable, including growing bag compost. This method has the advantage of allowing you to move your plants around and to either grow them in a greenhouse or to move them outside and to grow them on the patio when weather conditions are right. Simply plant into pots at the normal time for planting outside and provide some canes for support.

TRAINING

Cornichons require some training to produce the best crops. Outside, pinch out the growing point of trailing stems once they have produced seven leaves and leave both male and female flowers (the ones with tiny fruit behind them) to develop. Sideshoots are also pinched out at seven leaves.

In the greenhouse or in pots pinch out the main stem once it reaches the eaves or the top of the supports, and as sideshoots develop pinch these once they have produced a female flower, leaving two leaves beyond the developing fruit.

HARVESTING

Very young fruit may have a tendency to be bitter. Instead harvest when 10-15cm (4-6in) long to encourage more fruits to form.



WATCH OUT FOR

- Powdery mildew causes white patches to form on the leaves. Avoid splashing the foliage of greenhouse-grown plants with water and keep the roots moist (not wet). Choose a mildew tolerant variety such as 'Diamant F1'.
- Cucumber mosaic virus causes severe mottling and distortion of growth. It is spread by greenfly, so control these as soon as they appear and remove any infected plants.
- Whitefly colonise the underside of the leaves, sucking the sap and causing sooty mould to form on the foliage and fruit, especially under cover. Use sticky traps to catch early infestations and spray as necessary or use encarsia biological control.

WHAT DO YOU CALL YOURS?

In the East End of London a gherkin was often referred to as a wally, a term thought to date back to the 19th century. Do they have a special name in your neck of the woods? If so visit our Facebook page and let us know.

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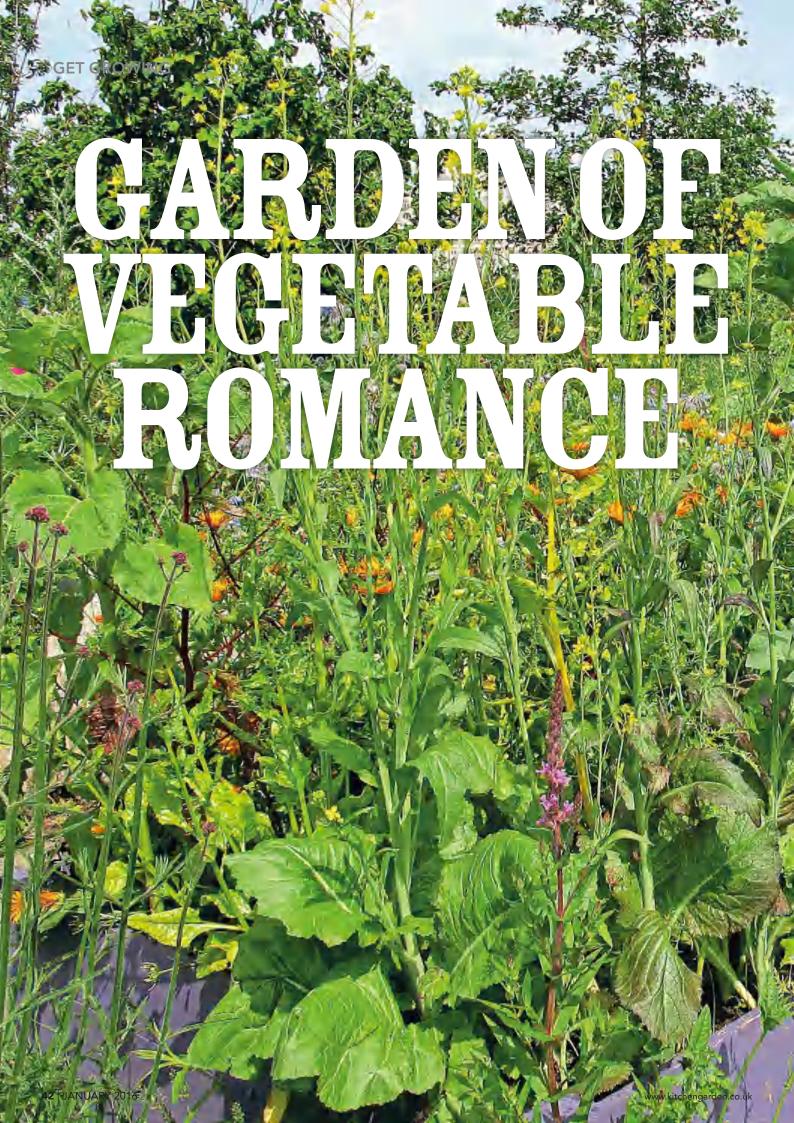
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GET GROWING

reated in 1951 for the Festival of Britain, the Southbank Centre is the epitome of post-war brutalist-chic. Yet, 70 years on, its spirit still transcends architectural ugliness in its support of music, dance, art and poetry. The site incorporates gems like the Royal Festival Hall, The Hayward Gallery and the Saison Poetry Library, and, at the top of a buttercup-yellow concrete staircase to the left of the building, there is a celebration of gardening too.

The Queen Elizabeth Roof Garden is a surprise bubble of biodiversity in the concrete jungle. A grassy seating area with Thames views is surrounded by a wildflower meadow, alive with honeybees, bumblebees and butterflies. This flourishing bouquet of native blooms segues into a formal potager, the raised beds overflowing with herbs, potatoes, salad and vegetables. The tables of the cafe-bar are thus surrounded with edible foliage and flowers, while olive and apple trees in large, brightly painted containers, add height and dappled shade.

BOHEMIAN REFUGE

Ultra-urban it may be but it is a million miles from standard-issue municipal ennui. There are veg at all stages of progress, some beds newly cultivated, some at their peak and some in the throes of a last, glorious swansong; a riot of spiralling seed heads and edible flowers in a colourful vegetable mayhem. There is a sense that this space is about the important things and unnecessary rules can be forgotten. Everyone is welcome to drink coffee, get some laptop time in or sit and engage with the wildlife and the touchable, tastable produce. No one seems to mind.

This relaxedness must, in part, be because the people who built and care for this garden know full well that there are greater things to worry about than visitors walking on the grass and grazing on the mangetout and marigolds. It is the work of Grounded Ecotherapy, and a partnership between the Eden Project and the Southbank Centre. It is a lovely, bohemian refuge for cocktail-sipping Londoners, a fun riverside diversion for those with children and approved safe location for internet dating. But above and beyond this, it offers an opportunity for people to re-establish their lives.





ABOVE: The wildflower meadow is alive with honeybees, bumblebees and butterflies

A REALLY SPECIAL GARDEN

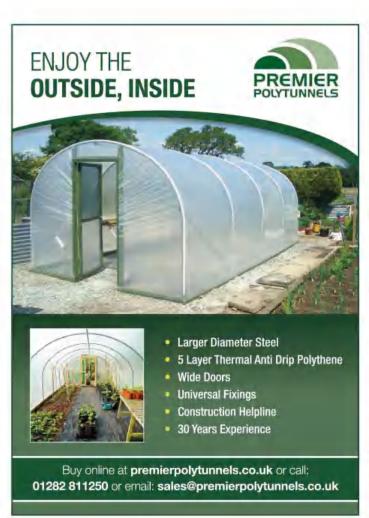
Paul Pulford is head gardener and a horticulture teacher for Grounded Ecotherapy. "We provide a service for homeless people, who often have a history of addiction to substances like crack cocaine and alcohol," he says. "There is the garden on this side and in the woodland area on the other side of the bridge we do green woodworking. It is an opportunity to pass on practical skills and for people to gain qualifications in horticulture. This is a really special garden."

Trevor has been with Grounded Ecotherapy since it first began, eight years ago. "I was living in a hostel for people with mental health issues; there was lots of drugs and drinking, then I met Paul and started gardening," he says. Along with six others, Trevor now has the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and Eden Project Certificate in Practical Horticulture and an NVQ in gardening and he has also worked at RHS Hampton Court Flower Show.

"I have done so much since I started gardening. I find it very therapeutic and I like being up here, it is good for my head. I come early to water before the public arrive. It's peaceful, it gives you a good direction and it's something to get up for. When you are working you are not thinking about the problems, just thinking about what you are doing."

BELOW: Raised beds overflow with herbs, potatoes, salad and . vegetables











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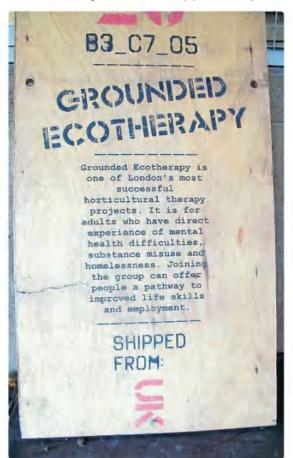




RESTRAINED ANARCHY

Operating as a kind of allotment in the sky, the garden promotes peace and wholeness. It embraces its city setting on the one hand with a large and decidedly gritty mural on the wall to the rear. In a more gentle homage to urban graffiti-art, the regular gardeners have adorned wooden benches with declarations of love, reading 'Trev 4 Sabs' and 'Scruffy hearts Scruff' – Scruffy being Paul's nickname and Scruff the name of his ever-present terrier.

Yet the garden is charming and restrained in its anarchy. Fig trees clothe concrete walls; crude wooden screens keep the focus on the cheerful lushness inside its boundaries, diverting attention from the modernist edifice behind. It is almost as if the place wants to be enjoyed; it takes your



ABOVE: There are veg at all stages of progress

LEFT: Grounded Ecotherapy is dedicated to helping people create green spaces in neglected

urban environments

BELOW: Wooden benches are adorned with messages of love

hand and sticks your nose into a pot of rosemary on a bistro table, distracts you with a cloud of butterflies, shows you a hidden but perfectly ripe wild strawberry.

"I'm indulging all my fantasies here," says Paul. "It is a selfish passion. Gardening, growing vegetables, wildflowers as herbs or medicine, green woodworking, playing with trees... I go out to play every day and if anyone wants to share my toys and play with me they can!" Paul's lunchtime speciality is a wild leaf salad including dandelions, chickweed, cowslip leaves, ribwort plantain and primrose flowers. "It is a real tonic salad and tastes wonderful with a dressing!"

TRIANGLE OF LOVE

With the assistance of Ruhel, a volunteer, he empties a raised bed of spent veg, refreshing the compost and reapplying nutrients. "Water, sun and nutrients – it is a triangle of love that results in veg!" he declares cheerfully, avoiding a lopsided cabbage and a feverfew in full bloom; "I let the veg flower: it educates the kids and people enjoy them. Look at all those hoverflies zipping around, can you believe it is a roof?"



OUT & ABOUT







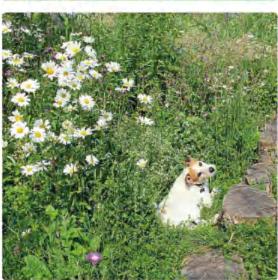
ABOVE: Paul Pulford, head gardener and horticulture teacher

ABOVE RIGHT: Fig trees growing against a concrete wall

LEFT: Paul Pulford and volunteer Ruhel

RIGHT: Paul's beloved terrier Scruff loves the roof garden, too

BELOW: Borage and calendula add colour and provide food for bees



The beds around him are cascading with produce, much of it in bloom, and previous generations of seeds have self-set around the edges, in any nook or cranny they can find. As a result the containers are adorned with a frill of fennel, chamomile and oregano. There is a square plot dedicated to salad tended by local group, the Coin Street Community Builders, and another packed with potatoes approaching harvest. Yet another is filled with (relatively) neat rows of onions and next to that a square which is a pure riot of mint, chamomile and towering *Verbena bonariensis*.

Since they started, the garden project has had a positive impact on many lives. People who had struggled with homelessness, many on benefits or drugs, or with any number of health issues, have been given new hope and focus, and five individuals have got jobs directly as a result of the training that they have received here.

In its way, this garden is a revolution; a counterpoint to the surrounding concrete brutality. It acts as a metaphor for the bleakness, toughness and ugliness of a life where, if you let it, beauty and joy can self-seed freely. The views of Imperial London across the great River Thames remind you of where, and who, you are. A sunlit patch of borage and marigolds, vibrating with pollen-dusted bees, reminds you of what is important. In the Queen Elizabeth Roof Garden, life springs eternal and unstoppable; a fitting echo of what the Festival of Britain 1951 was all about: hope, recovery and pride.

- Southbank Centre, Belvedere Rd, London SE1 8XX
- http://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/visitor-info/shop-eatdrink/restaurants/roof-garden-cafe/bar
- http://groundedproject.org
- www.edenproject.com



INTHIS YEAR OF THE TOMATO ... why not try a new variety?

Tomatoes must be one of our favourite things to grow – you just have to look at the number of varieties available. So what's new on the tomato seed scene for 2016?



t looks like beefsteak and cherry varieties are the showstoppers this year with a good range appearing in seed catalogues. Some are wholly new, and some are new to a particular catalogue but which can sometimes be found in others too. Hopefully, some of these lovely toms will tickle your fancy.

BEEFSTEAK BEAUTIES

If you like your tomatoes big and meaty then here are some new big boy bobby dazzlers on the block.

'OVI'S ROMANIAN GIANT' is a beefsteak variety originating from a village in Romania. Developed for commercial sales over a number of years, the original seed was a gift to the company from a friend named Ovi, hence its name. It has a smooth and buttery taste, and produces fruit often over 1kg (2.2lbs). The plants are vigorous and will produce fruit way into the autumn. It is prone to 'cat facing' (a kind of scarring) at the blossom end of the tomato but this can be cut off and doesn't affect flavour (Sea Spring, 20 seeds/£2).

'GIGANTOMO F1' beefsteak came under KG's own scrutiny last year and had its own category at the autumn Harrogate Flower Show. This variety can produce fruits between 0.5-1.5kg (1-3lbs) in weight. The winning entry at Harrogate weighed in at 1.75kg (3.85lbs). Apart from all the publicity surrounding its size, however, this is a perfectly fine beefsteak for the kitchen (T&M, 8 seeds/£3.99).

If you're looking for an attractive looking beefsteak then 'BOUNTIFUL F1' has uniformly shaped ribs, and a sweet and tangy flavour. (Mr Fothergill's, 10 seeds £3.25). Or for a smaller beefsteak variety which crops well you could go for 'RED BODYGUARD F1' (Mr Fothergill's, 10 seeds/£1.95).

BRANDY BOY F1' has an intriguing pink tinge, capturing the qualities of the 'Brandywine' heirloom flavour but with improved disease resistance, a shapelier growth habit and bigger yields (Suttons, 10 seeds, £3.49).





For a touch of the continental, you might want to try 'COSTOLUTO FIORENTIO', a meaty, deep-ribbed Italian variety great for roasting or for making sauces (The Organic Gardening Catalogue, 25 seeds/£1.84; also Real Seeds and Seeds of Italy).

Though certainly not one to wrestle with 'BIG DADDY' is a large, meaty beefsteak with fruits weighing up to 425g (15oz) (Kings, 15 seeds/£1.60). 'BOLSTAR GRANDA' produces 100g (3½oz) tomatoes, nine to a truss (The Organic Gardening Catalogue, 15 seeds/£2.99).







BLIGHT BUSTERS

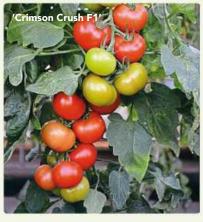
If you've had blight on your tomatoes you know just how devastating it can be. And with these wet and humid summers we seem to be getting lately, we are much more prone. But now that blight resistant varieties are available, why take the risk?

'MOUNTAIN MAGIC F1' - T&M's Vegetable of the Year for 2016 - should let us all sleep better in our beds. This variety has been developed with outside growers in mind, so all you need to do is find a sunny spot and away you go. Promising resistance to all current British strains, this is a cordon variety, fine for salads, sandwiches and in cooking (T&M, 5 seeds/£3.99; also Kings and Simpsons).

Andrew Tokely, seed purchasing manager at Kings Seeds, said: "This is the best outdoor variety I have ever grown. I picked the last fruits in November and the plants were still completely blight free, whereas others had been hit badly earlier in the year."

Another blight resistant variety is 'CRIMSON CRUSH F1' which is promoted as 'the first fully blight resistant tomato' and bred for outdoor growing. Here at Kitchen Garden we tried out this variety in our gardens last year so look out for the full review in the February issue. (Suttons, 10 seeds/£3.99). ➤





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GET GROWING



'Pink Charmer F1'





CHOICE CHERRIES

There is no doubt that cherry tomatoes are pleasant to the taste buds and pleasing on the eye. Their popularity seems to grow year on year, and there is an excellent range of varieties available – the term 'spoilt for choice' springs to mind. These new ones show how much variation there is in terms of size and colour.

This medley of sweet-tasting tomatoes with their vibrant colours are perfect for salads with red 'SUNCHERRY SMILE F1', reddish-brown 'SUNCHOLA F1'; and yellow 'SUNLEMON F1' (Mr Fothergill's, 10 seeds per packet/£3.25 each).

And in the same vein as these there is 'SUNPEACH F1', producing high yields of reddish-pink, early ripening fruits; 'SUNCHERRY PREMIUM F1', another bitesized heavy cropper and 'SUNGREEN F1' producing green but sweet-tasting fruits (Mr Fothergill's, 10 seeds/£3.25).

Fancy some more unusual colours? Try 'PINK CHARMER F1' which produces full trusses of rosy pink fruit (T&M, 10 seeds/£1.99), or the bronze-coloured 'GARNET' which will crop well into autumn and has good resistance to cracking (Plants of Distinction 15 seeds/£2.50). Meanwhile 'CHERRY BABY' is a sweet, heavy cropping variety (Plants of Distinction, 15 seeds/£2.95).



Siberian in origin 'BLACK PRINCE' has dark, chocolate-brown skin promising good, early yields and a sweet flavour – perfect for salads (Suttons, 20 seeds £2.99; also Robinson's). 'BLACK OPAL' produces small, tangy fruits on long trusses with an estimated 150 to 200 fruits per plant in an average growing season with good disease tolerance (Kings, 20 seeds/£1.85). And you could always try 'FARENHEIT' which turns from blue to red to black, though probably more interesting for its colour shifts than for its flavour (Real Seeds, 20 seeds/£2.47).

If small is beautiful then you won't get much smaller or more beautiful than these 'RED CURRANT' and 'YELLOW

currant' tomatoes. Though not new varieties as such, they are included in Rob Smith's new Heritage Veg range. These mini toms originate from the wilds of Peru but their tiny, crisp fruit with a sweet and tangy taste will grow just as well in your garden or greenhouse (Dobies, 30 seeds/£2.49).



What we mustn't forget about tomatoes is that although they are delicious to eat, they can have a decorative function too. 'PEARDROPS F1' bears yellow, pear-shaped fruits, and is a good choice for baskets and containers to brighten up conservatories and patios. (Suttons, 12 seeds/£2.99).



PICK 'N' MIX

If you don't want to put all your tomatoes in one basket as it were, you can take advantage of 'SUMMER SENSATION MIX', a mix of different sized and shaped varieties (Suttons, 20 seeds/£2.99).

Alternatively, as part of his Grow for Flavour range you could opt for a James Wong tomato twin pack, such as the heirloom sauce tomato 'SAN MARZANO' and the prolific yellow grape tomato 'ILDI'. These new seed combo packs also include 'ROSELLA'/'GREEN ZEBRA', 'GARDENER'S DELIGHT'/ 'TANGERINE' or 'GREEN ENVY'/'RUSSIAN ROSE' (Suttons, 60 seeds/£3.99).

SUPPLIERS

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Every gardener's dream -The first fully blight resistant tomato



Voted Vegetable of the Year 2016

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Very sweet and flavoursome

Versatile variety ideal for salads, sandwiches and cooking

Smooth ruby red tomatoes, evenly shaped and crack resistant

Tomato 'Mountain Magic' FI Hybrid



Now you can enjoy bumper crops of wonderfully flavoursome tomatoes that won't succumb to blight! Long clusters of deliciously sweet tomatoes will smother your 'Mountain Magic' plant from July through to October. And that

Horticultural Director is not all! This amazing tomato has an exceptional resistance to blight. It not only has the ability to withstand early blight, it also carries inbuilt genes against late blight which has had such a virulent effect on UK crops, It also has in built genetic resistance to both wilt and cracking giving you uniform, evenly shaped,

round, rich red tomatoes. And to top it all and something I have never seen before in modern hybrids, you will be hard pushed to find better flavour from such a disease resistant variety. This tasty, all purpose tomato really has everything going for it and is delicious eaten raw from the vine, in salads or in cooking. Easy to grow in sunny vegetable areas and borders as well a in grow bags and patio containers.

I am so confident that you will not be disappointed with your crop that I will give you double your money back if you don't believe it's the best tomato you have ever grown! *Dispatched next working day.

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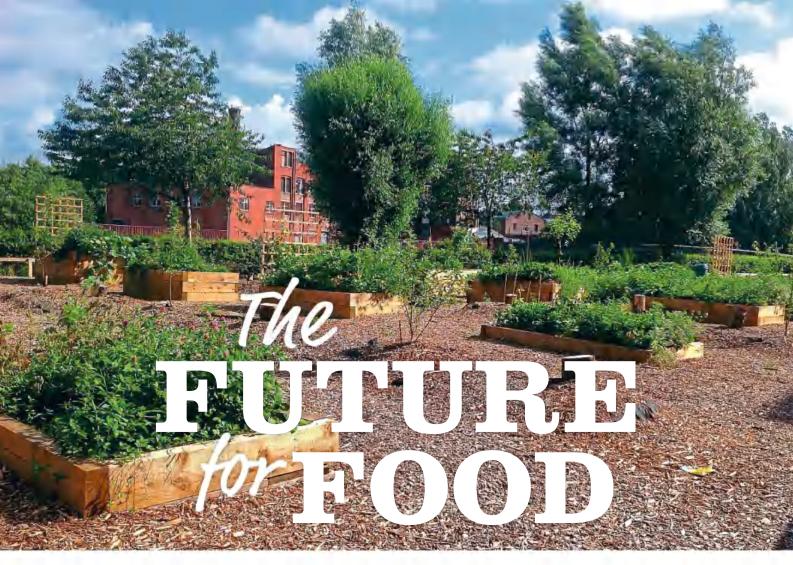
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The Biospheric Foundation is an 'urban food laboratory' which aims to inspire new thinking about food-growing and the environment, as Gaby Bartai finds out



The Biospheric Foundation building, viewed from the forest garden

ne of the most successful events of the 2013 Manchester International Festival (MIF) was a 'multi-systems vertical urban farming experiment' called The Biospheric Project. From the perspective of MIF this was an innovative arts installation which would continue beyond the festival as a legacy for the city. From the altogether more pragmatic standpoint of a KG writer interested in it looked like a source of ecological systems, inspiration on new ways to but more, I'm grow fruit and veg. I went to Manchester to find interested in

out more. the connectivity The Biospheric Foundation was established between in 2011, when founder and systems" director Vincent Walsh was embarking on a PhD researching ecological food production systems for the 21st-century city. This is not academic research as you might imagine it. Vincent is a man on a mission. He wanted to take an 'action-led' approach, where his research would be generated by the work of actually creating the systems. He was also committed to the idea of taking research out of the university. "I needed a building, I needed a piece of land, and I needed

a community with a lack of food access," he says.

He found all three in Blackfriars in Salford, one of the top 3% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. He'd mapped the area and discovered that there were 67 places to get unhealthy food, and only one which sold fresh fruit and vegetables.

"I'm

Conversations with community groups highlighted issues around access to food and unsurprisingly - poor health, and drew support for the idea of locating the project

in the area.

ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

The building Vincent found was a derelict three-storey former printworks on the bank of the River Irwell. Between the

building and the river was a piece of land where self-seeded trees shared space with fly-tipped rubbish. The rent being asked for the building and the land was low, but not affordable on top of the rent on his flat, so he did the obvious thing - obvious, at least, if you're working at his level of commitment. He gave up his flat and moved into the building, where he's been living ever since.





The Foundation (on the left) and forest garden (on the right) are dwarfed by the adjacent social housing tower blocks



A woodchip mulch has been laid across the whole forest garden site to encourage beneficial fungi

For the first six months, he worked more or less single-handed. Only once he'd cleared all the rubbish out of the building, dealt with the asbestos, and installed electrics and other useful features like stairs, was he able to start bringing other people – and funders – on board. But in the meantime he had already started to develop ecological systems in and around the building: worm composting, an aquaponic system, where fish and crops are cultivated in a shared environment, a roof-top garden complete with a polytunnel, chickens and bees, and a forest garden on the adjacent land. He was also working towards opening a wholefood store, to be located on the ground floor of one of the adjacent social housing tower blocks.

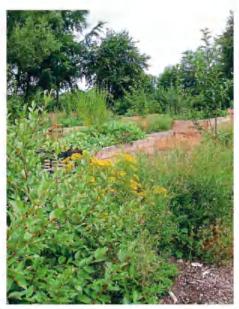
Nine months into his project, Vincent was approached by Manchester International Festival. "That was a game-changer. Because at the time I was just a solo PhD student, probably trying to take on too much," he says.

The partnership with MIF allowed him to attract funding from a range of sponsors, which enabled the transformation of the building into an exhibition space illustrating the potential of derelict industrial sites for urban food production.

Over the 18 days of the festival in July 2013, the foundation laid on a programme of tours, events and workshops. Amazingly, Vincent managed to do all this and stay on course with his PhD thesis, which he submitted last autumn.

JOINED-UP THINKING

"The reason we are called the Biospheric Foundation comes from my research," says Vincent. "I'm interested in ecological systems, but more, I'm interested in the connectivity between systems. The biosphere is the region of the earth's system where all life resides. It's the creativity between ecosystems that creates the biosphere, and its resilience and its adaptability. And what I'm trying to do here is create a materially closed



The maturing forest garden in summer

system, just like the biosphere itself."

How that works in practice, he explains, is that the wholefood store produces compostable waste, which feeds the worm composting system. This, in turn, produces wormcast, worm tea and more worms. The wormcast and worm tea support the forest garden, while surplus worms feed the fish in the aquaponic system.

The waste products from the fish enrich their water, which is pumped up to the polytunnel, where the crops take up the nutrients. Crops from the polytunnel (and, in principle, from the forest garden) go into the wholefood store, completing the cycle. The system is 'materially closed' because the 'inputs' which each element requires are sourced from within the system, and each element's 'outputs' supply another part of the system – so nothing needs to be imported, and there is no waste.

For the Biospheric Foundation, food-growing is only part of the story. "Our food systems ▶

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GET GROWING

tend to be a reduction of an ecological system. The difference between an agroforestry system and an orchard is a perfect example. An ecological system produces carbon store, biodiversity, nutrients, food, beverages, oils, resins... a food production system produces - food." The key, says Vincent, is to start thinking about food production within larger ecological systems - and then start connecting those up. This will chime with gardeners who are concerned to reduce the ecological impact of their gardens by composting and recycling, and with gardens and community spaces which combine food production with functions such as provision for wildlife.

FOREST FRUIT

Because the foundation is a research centre, says Vincent, it's constantly experimenting – and things have not always turned out as expected. For instance, the original idea was to produce food for the shop in the forest garden - until tests revealed the presence of 18 heavy metals in the soil. But, says Vincent, this has all been part of the learning process. "First my heart sunk, but second, I realised, actually, no, contamination within urban environments is a massive interesting research area."

So food production has been redirected into research; each year, the garden's fruit is sent to Manchester Metropolitan University to be analysed. The data gathered will allow the foundation to work out if it's possible to grow tree crops on polluted urban land, and if so, what species and varieties, and over what timescale - which will benefit community gardens facing the same problem.

In the meantime, the forest garden is employing the strategy used by many urban community gardens - high raised beds, filled with imported soil - so that staff and local people can eat the shallower-rooting crops.



Fruit trees, edible perennials and what the unenlightened might call weeds make up the layers of a forest garden

The trees originally growing on the site couldn't be integrated into the forest garden design, but none of their biomass has left the system. Some was converted into woodchip, which is used as a fungi-friendly mulch, and the tree trunks became the first layer of the new ecosystem. "We dug a metre and a half down, took all the topsoil out, laid the large trees down, inoculated them with mycorrhizal fungi, on top of that we put hay and straw, then backfilled it.'

The fungi circulate nutrients around the system, and the site is also studded with tree stumps which have been inoculated with oyster mushrooms - not for eating, because of the soil contamination, but to disperse spores. "Our urban soils are very poor, and if we want to develop complex ecological systems, we need really good soil structures. Fungi is a massive part of that."

It takes a while to work out how to 'read' a forest garden; at first glance, it's easy to mistake it for a neglected kitchen garden. It isn't weeded; instead, vegetation is cut back every four to six weeks, and left on the ground as a sheet mulch. Compared to an orchard or a vegetable garden,



The fish tanks are housed on the top floor of the building, and the water is pumped up to the polytunnel on the roof

it looks unkempt - until you start to detect the order amid the apparent chaos. The garden is planted up in layers: ground cover plants, close to 100 different perennial crops, fruiting trees on a dwarfing rootstock, and larger fruiting trees.

Despite the issues about how to produce pollution-free food, Vincent thinks that urban agroforestry has huge potential. Given the pressure on space in cities, developing foodgrowing systems with a vertical dimension is, he says, an obvious way forward.

FISH FOOD

Aquaponics is a combination of aquaculture rearing fish - and hydroponics - raising plants using nutrient solutions. If fish waste is left to accumulate in a tank, it becomes toxic to the fish, but an aquaponic system filters out this waste and utilises it as a nutrient to support plant growth.

The foundation's aquaponics system is huge, with a bank of fish tanks circulating 12,000 litres of water and the potential to produce around 3000 leaf crops per month. The system is multilayered, making it, as far as they know, a world

GREENHOUSES OF THE FUTURE

A key part of Vincent's work explores ways in which to merge biology and technology. His 'biofacade' is, he says, a perfect example. "It's generated by the bios, the ecology, the software, and monitored by the technos, the architecture, the hardware."

Designed by the Biospheric Foundation in partnership with Queen's University Belfast and architectural practice BDP, the biofacade is an aquaponic system. Made from glass, it incorporates fish tanks and, above them, space for leaf crops. The idea is that it replaces part of the wall of a building, reclaiming dormant space for productivity. It functions like a greenhouse, trapping warmth and extending the range of crops which can be grown, while also moderating the temperature of the building.

The prototype will be installed into the south wall of the foundation building. "We're about to take a window out, all the brickwork from column to column, from ceiling to floor, and so this biofacade will become part of the building itself. That changes everything about how we think about our buildings. Our buildings are no longer concrete, glass, mortar, our buildings are becoming ecological systems, systems that self-regulate." The plan is to develop the biofacade into a system suitable for industrial and commercial buildings such as supermarkets, offices or hospitals. Could it one day also offer a radical new growing solution for gardeners living in flats?



A prototype for the biofacade, with lights at the top, plants in the centre, and fish tanks at the bottom. The final version, to be installed in the wall of the building, will utilise sunlight



The wholefood shop is called 78 Steps because that's the distance food travels from the farm

first. A traditional aquaponic set-up consists of fish tanks, leaf crops and lights within a single space. At the foundation, the fish tanks are on the top floor of the building, and the crops are in the polytunnel on the roof, so they can utilise sunlight rather than artificial lights.

On its way to the polytunnel, the nutrientrich water from the fish tanks is circulated through a vertical hydroponic growing system against the south-facing windows of the building. A framework against each window supports an array of plastic pouches, each holding a single plant: salads, tomatoes, strawberries, beans and peas. The water is then pumped on to the polytunnel crops, before being returned to the fish completely clean.

One of the foundation's aims, says Vincent, is

to develop microsystems that people could use at home – so might aquaponics be a future possibility for home gardeners? There's no reason why not, says Vincent, though you would need to be a fish expert as well as a gardener. "We're always testing, making sure the fish are well, and the chemical balance is right - people who keep aquariums know that instantly, so you're definitely more there if you're already keeping fish."

If you're a gardening fishkeeper who would be intrigued to try something new, check out the internet for systems aimed at amateur growers. The principle of an aquaponic system is that the fish are also a harvestable crop - at the foundation they're using carp, a cold-water species suited to their unheated building - but it would also work to keep the fish as pets and just eat the crops.

THE BIOSPHERIC GARDEN

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The challenge now is for the foundation to build on the success of its MIF exposure. Vincent envisages a future where clusters of urban housing operate as technological hubs incorporating advanced food-growing systems. This will, he says, require a whole new field of research into the 'closed' ecological systems that could support a sustainable approach to urban food production.

"We've got aquaponics, we've got hydroponics, we've got aeroponics, vermiponics... hardly any of them have been developed. We've reduced the way we think about our food systems, and actually there's a whole range of ways of producing food... just in agroforestry, there's thousands of different ways. It's a rich, rich culture of ecology." He readily admits that finding answers is going to take a while. "But we're asking some very interesting questions." ■

FIND OUT MORE:

Biospheric Foundation, Upper Floor, Irwell House, East Philip Street, Salford M3 7LE Tel: 0161 839 6872

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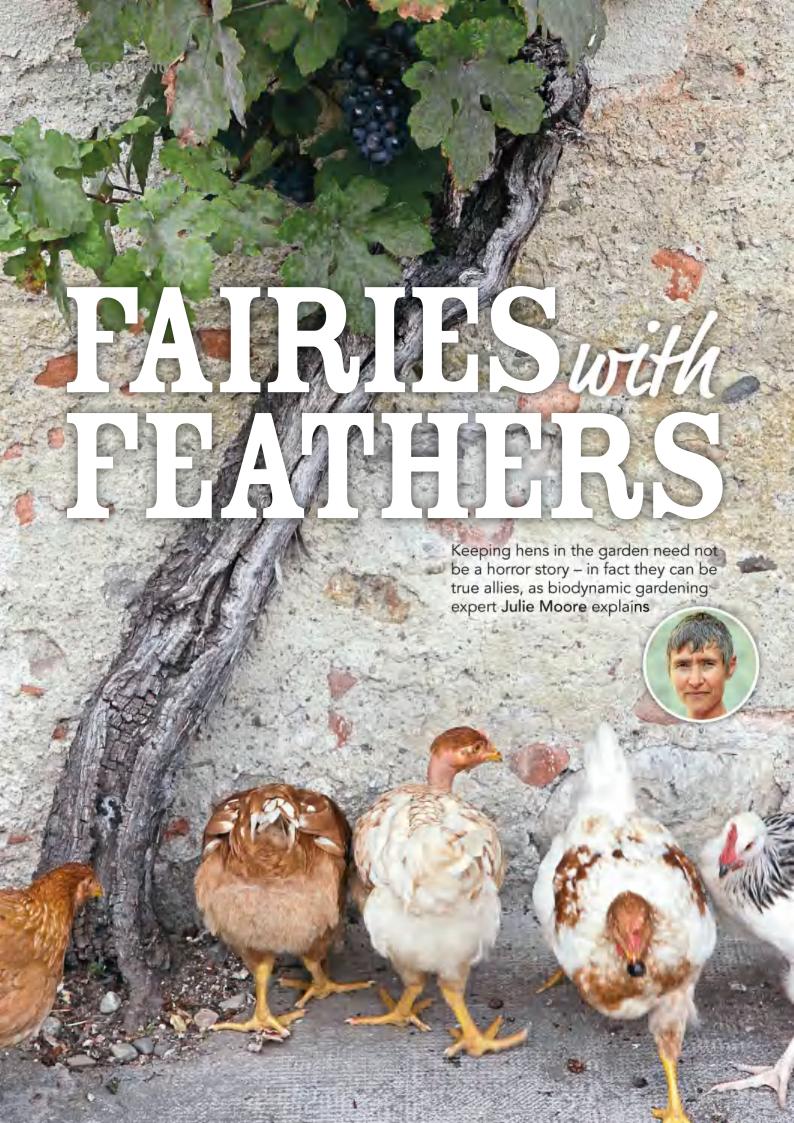




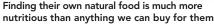




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Instead of using a mechanical rotavator, try chicken power

iven half a chance, chickens can create havoc in any garden, digging up newly planted flower beds, making dust baths in your once immaculate lawn which now bears a striking resemblance to a minefield, not to mention decimating your prized crops in a matter of minutes. But it needn't be a horror story – with a little careful planning, your chickens can be your perfect garden allies.

Chickens love nothing better than to be in the open air and sunshine, exercising, and satisfying their curiosity while finding their own natural foods which are far superior to anything we can buy for them.

So why not reap the benefits of their passion for the great outdoors and put your flock to work? Not only will your feathered friends help on the labour front, they'll help your pocket too.

If you're to enlist the services of your flock, it's only possible to garden organically. While chemical fertilisers and pesticides are potentially harmful to your chickens, your flock are low-cost, energetic organic pesticides and fertilisers all in one!

BUG PATROL

As omnivores, chickens have a huge appetite for damaging insects, snails, beetles and even mice and snakes, all of which are good sources of protein for them. If you have fruit trees, your flock will clean up any fallen fruit and, in doing so, help break the life cycle of damaging insects and also diseases, the spores of which may overwinter in the decaying fruit. Bug patrol stints are particularly effective in the spring when damaging insects are most prevalent and again in the autumn when many species start heading underground for the winter.

There's no doubt about it, using a power rotavator to break up the soil is hard work, particularly if the soil is heavy and, coupled with the noise, it doesn't make for an enjoyable task. But have you ever considered using chicken power instead?

Mechanical rotavation breaks down the 'crumb' structure of fine garden soil, mixing together the layers that develop a natural soil profile. Chickens, on the other hand, scratch only at the surface layer without disrupting soil structure. They'll boost soil life and fertility with their droppings that they'll obligingly turn under as they work. Tilling also offers a banquet of nutritious food (such as earthworms and insects) and fresh greens (such as chickweed and dandelion leaves) as a reward for their hard work.



CHICKEN POWER

If you have a severe annual weed problem, instead of using stale seed beds (where weeds are encouraged to germinate, then destroyed), employ chicken power. Emerging weed seedlings won't stand a chance against the incessant scratching of chickens — they'll quickly deplete the seed bank in the surface soil layer, thus reducing subsequent weed seedlings dramatically, which means less weeding for you.

If you grow green manures, refrain from digging them in and instead send in your flock. Not only will the birds benefit from nutritious greens, if crops such as buckwheat are left to mature, the chickens can feast on an abundance of seeds too. Afterwards, the chickens will obligingly do the digging in for you while you work elsewhere.

Poultry manure has long been regarded as the most desirable animal manure among organic gardeners, ranking top in nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. When combined with straw or other bedding materials, it not only adds nutrients to the soil but organic matter too.

Hens produce on average 85-15g (3-4oz) of fresh manure daily. A flock of six hens will provide 186-252kg (410-547lbs) of valuable organic fertiliser a year.

'HOT' MANURE

Fresh chicken droppings, often referred to as 'hot' manure due to the high nitrogen content, should be composted first before it can be used as a fertiliser. Adding fresh manure directly to your plot may burn plant roots and seedlings or make your perennials grow so fast they become thin and weedy. The odd dropping courtesy of your working flock won't present a problem as they will be working well ahead of the planting season and the droppings will have a chance to decompose.

It is possible to have too much of a good thing, particularly as nitrogen is a challenging nutrient to manage on your plot. Applying excessive amounts of nitrogen to certain crops such as tomatoes will result in mainly leaf growth and little fruit.

To some extent, your hens will help you mow the lawn, particularly if they're confined to a small area. Poultry are fussy grazers though and won't eat everything – a blend of grasses and legumes such as clover are the most palatable forage. Chickens like their forages relatively short; younger and more succulent plants tend to be shorter, less fibrous and therefore more palatable. You'll still need to mow the grass, but not quite so often.

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Your feathered army can make the back-breaking chore of scarifying the lawn fade into a distant memory. Their scratching will de-moss and aerate the lawn – you'll be amazed at how much thatch they can find and remove! They'll also break the thatch down into smaller and more decomposable pieces.

But it's not all such a rosy picture. If left unsupervised, your feathered workforce could unknowingly (to them) be creating havoc.

DUST BATHING ZONEIt's not practical to give your

as you! If there's a choice

and weeds, they'll go for the

between young tender shoots

"It's not practical to give your chickens free rein in the vegetable plot during the growing season. Not only will their incessant scratching cause widespread destruction, they'll devour your crops which they happen to like just as much

in the vegetable plot during the growing season"

shoots every time, so your edible
plot may be over before it even starts.
However, letting them range on the plot

during the winter months and until you're ready to sow in spring will help curb overwintering pest populations.

Mulched areas are a headache for any chicken keeper. The birds will happily kick mulch everywhere as they scratch in search of food. Clearing up the mess can be a chore, but perhaps you need to remind yourself that the bug population has decreased in size as a result of their antics.

As your flock now view your garden as their own personal buffet, they usually decide that it also doubles up as a dust bathing zone. The ideal bathing spot is normally in the middle of a row of crops or among a prized bed of flowers!



Many people overestimate the number of chickens their land can handle which will lead to overgrazing as the flock denude the grass and other vegetation, if you don't intervene. For free-ranging flocks, it's best to generously overestimate the outdoor space required.

Maximising the benefits of your feathered workforce may require some sort of



Poultry manure is regarded as the most desirable animal manure among organic gardeners



A chicken tractor allows the hens to work in a specific area



Large stones placed around the base of plants discourage chickens from scratching

confinement. A good option is to use a chicken tractor. This is essentially a small, lightweight, portable, bottomless pen which can be put on a specific area of the plot for the chickens to 'work' while the adjacent beds remain unscathed. Chicken tractors can be any size or shape and can be designed to fit over your raised beds. It can double up as a cold frame by covering with horticultural fleece or clear plastic sheeting when you're not using it as a tractor.

Fencing, either around the garden or to contain your chickens, is your best option to protect your plants. The fencing can be either permanent or temporary. Temporary fencing is particularly useful in orchard areas and around the vegetable plot during the growing season and can then be removed in the autumn to allow your flock to help clear and prepare the areas for winter.

PROTECTING YOUR PLANTS

If your chickens are free-range, the chances are that you'll need to protect certain individual plants and seedlings. A simple collar of chicken wire can be placed around small, delicate plants and is normally enough to discourage chickens provided they have plenty of other food on offer. Recently sown seeds or newly planted groundcover plants can be protected using sturdier galvanised mesh. Chickens love flicking loose soil out of pots and containers. To stop their antics, place a ring of large stones around the base of each plant. To outwit your feathered friends, try sowing seeds in the crevices between stones that chickens can't get at. As the chickens are unable to scratch in the sowing area, the seeds will have a chance to germinate.

Designing a chicken-friendly garden will allow you to live in harmony with your birds. Providing many layers of different plants,





Rows of onions also double up as a dust bath for this cheeky hen

including evergreens for the winter, encourages chickens to forage and will offer protection from overhead predators. A chicken-friendly garden can provide food for both you and your birds.

You'll find that gardening with chickens is a constantly evolving process. Before hoisting the white flag in surrender, with a little planning your chickens can become your perfect garden allies rather than enemies.



A simple collar of chicken wire can be placed around small, delicate plants for protection and is normally enough to deter chickens if they have a plentiful supply of other food

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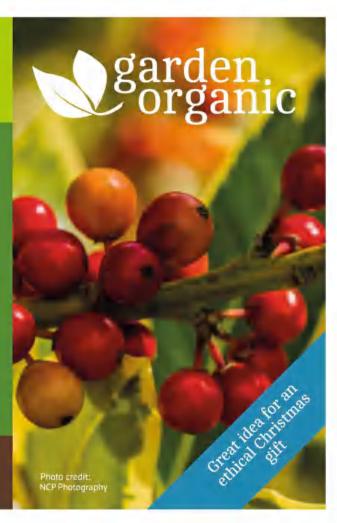
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Sometimes referred to as 'gardener's gold', the benefits of adding animal manure to your vegetable plot cannot be underestimated – where there's muck there's magic – as Lucy Halliday explains

t may well be the most ancient trick in the history of gardening but adding animal manures to your soil will never get old. For good reason has the rich, sweetly smelling well-rotted manure heap acquired the name of 'gardener's gold' for it is the finest natural soil improver you are likely to come across.

In my role as kitchen gardener at Knightshayes in Devon I quite simply can't get enough of the stuff! We mulch the heavy red clay on which our garden is based every year with a deep layer of horse manure and the results speak for themselves: produce abounds and the soil is open, warm and easy to work. If you have never given muck a try or are addicted to synthetic fertiliser pellets, give manure one season to work its magic and you will be glad you did, two seasons and you will be in love. It will enrich your soil ecosystem, feed your plants, even out any issues with heavy or overly light soil textures and reduce the amount of watering you need to do.

It can sometimes be a bit more work to get hold of for free but it is very satisfying to leave a stable yard with your car boot groaning under the weight of a muck-filled sack. However, you can now order a huge bag or a pallet of convenient sacks at the click of a mouse so it has never been easier to overhaul your veg patch and kick it into super productivity. Whether applied fresh, well rotted or used as a compost activator, it is my personal philosophy that nothing is too much trouble to get muck to your soil as it pays back every ounce of effort tenfold.

HISTORY OF MANURE USE

Manure use has a history as venerable as agriculture itself and even huntergatherers knew it aided plant growth before that. The cycle of productivity between humans, domesticated animals and the soil is a sacred one, taking a waste product and turning it into food in a way that keeps balance within ecosystems. Manure adds more than just soil nutrients; it adds soil fauna and flora, increasing nutrient availability and opening up the texture, including encouraging lots of worms. It creates rich, moisture-retentive soil, resistant to erosion or compaction and much easier to work.

Every farming culture the world over has employed manure to improve their

soil and there is surviving evidence for its early uses. At the ancient

home of agriculture in the Fertile Crescent, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, in modern-day Iraq, clay tablets have been found documenting manure usage from the reign of the Mesopotamian King Sargon of the Akkadian dynasty, between 2320BC and 2120BC. In the UK, archaeological evidence shows that Neolithic and Bronze Age farmers in Scotland were 'muck spreading' by ploughing through muck heaps before sowing their crops. The ancient Greeks, Romans and Egyptians were all



at it too, using different types of manure such as goat, sheep and cattle for different purposes.

Many of these processes including using heat from manure to aid the growth process were inherited and developed by the Victorians and it has been said that the grand Victorian households 'ran on muck'. Throughout the development of the walled kitchen gardening tradition, the stables were always built close to the garden where the indispensable manure would be employed.

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A well-rotted heap of 'bought in' farmyard manure blend (cow and horse muck)



A trailer load of muck delivered to my allotment site by arrangement with a local farmer



MANURE REVIEW:

Although the spectrum of manures used around the world ranges from bat guano to human waste you are most likely to use a few main types in the UK. Some are 'hot' manures rich in nitrogen from urea such as chicken or goose. These require a little care when applied to avoid 'scorching' tender roots. Others are 'cooler', such as cow, sheep and horse, especially as these are generally mixed with bedding material which is best composted first. Dog and cat manures may harbour disease so should be avoided. Manures are not a homogenous product so the NPK percentages given are a rough guide only.

HORSE: Generally plentiful in supply and makes a simply wonderful soil conditioner. Fresh, it grows fantastic cucurbits and well rotted it



converts almost any soil into a rich crumbly dark brown. It is not the highest in nutrients but contains a good amount of nitrogen and respectable levels of phosphates and potash in a good balance. Needs longer to compost if it is mixed with wood shavings and can contain rather a lot of weed seeds but again, composting will deal with this. N=0.7% P=0.4% K=0.6%

COW: A good manure but with a relatively low overall nutrient level, particularly in phosphates, it does however make a great soil conditioner once composted, adding plenty of organic bulk to improve texture and moisture retention. As cows famously have four stomachs it is also generally weed seed free. N=0.6% P=0.2% K=0.5%

SHEEP/GOAT: Very useful in the garden. A milder, drier muck that doesn't scorch plants, it is high in nitrogen and potash. The



problem is likely to be that, as sheep are grazed in the open, it may be a case of picking up dispersed droppings; however, it makes a great top dressing for tomato plants and will almost certainly be free. It can have a few weed seeds but can be composted to overcome this if needed. N=0.7% P=0.3% K=0.9%

CHICKEN/POULTRY: Chicken manure is commonly sold in pelleted form and can be a great fertiliser for non-ericaceous plants (i.e. don't use on your blueberries). It has generally the highest nitrogen level for manure, plus phosphates and usable quantities of other important nutrients as well so is good for leafy crops and brassicas. It is slow to release its nutrients so it must be added to the soil in plenty of time, ideally the winter before planting as it will begin to give up its bounty once the soil warms in spring. Use 150g per



square metre as a rough guide for pelleted poultry manures. Fruiting plants will benefit from additional potassium if this is the only manure fertiliser you use. Fresh poultry manure in litter from the coop can also be used as a top dressing in spring for blackcurrants, plum trees and leafy veg or used as an activator for your compost heap alternating a 5cm (2in) layer with other compost ingredients. N=1.6% P=1.6% K=1.7%

PET MANURE: The contents of your rabbit hutch, guinea pig house and gerbil cage should go on your compost heap as activators. Rabbit manure is nutrient rich, beating even poultry manures. This waste also often includes useful sources of carbon for the compost heap in the form of hay or newspaper and often soaked in nitrogen rich urine so don't leave this stuff out, just shred it up a little. N=2.4% P=1.4% K=0.6% for rabbit.

HOW MUCH, WHERE AND WHEN?

FRESH: You don't always have to wait to use your muck. Some plants such as runner beans and squash will happily grow in planting holes or trenches enriched with a good helping of fresh muck. Add a minimum of a spadeful per plant. Cucumbers and melons will also grow excellently on simple 'hot beds' built with a layer of fresh muck topped with soil or well-rotted garden compost to plant into. Relatively fresh muck can also be piled on top of rhubarb plants in autumn once they have died down. It acts as a protective 'hat' for winter and they will grow up through the rotted remains in spring.

COMPOSTING: Composting manure has numerous benefits and some manures such as cow are only really suitable for use once composted. Remembering that it is faeces we are talking about here, manure can be a source of pathogens such as E. coli and parasites, and the composting process largely takes care of these. Hot composting also kills off many weed seeds which may be present, particularly in horse manure, due to their digestive processes. Rotting the manure helps it to release its nutrients better as fresh manure contains bedding materials that can initially rob nitrogen from the soil as they decompose.

Manure can be built into a layered heap and, much like ordinary composting, turning speeds up and improves its decomposition. Leaving your heap for six months will result in a much more friable, sweeter smelling soil improver, suitable for almost all your veg crops bar root vegetables. You can leave manure to rot for up to a year and occasionally you may come across even more aged rich black stuff in stable yards and this intensely well-rotted stuff can be great for asparagus beds. Each year, well-rotted manure should be applied at a minimum of one generous barrowful per 10 square metres and in a layer up to 7cm thick across the soil where soil is particularly poor.



MULCHING: Fresh and well-rotted manure can be used when mulching and are excellent for retaining moisture. Never pile any manure up against the stems or trunks of plants as it may scorch them or cause rot. Fresh manure can be added around fruit trees and bushes in spring and autumn. Well-rotted manure is particularly useful around container-grown fruit. Mulch around sweet peas, edible peas, brassicas, potatoes, and bean crops with well-rotted manure for weed suppression, nutrients and moisture. Treading down manure mulches lightly helps them to create a soil cap which is harder for weeds to find a foothold in as most blow-in seeds prefer a fine tilth (we do this around our no-dig beds at Knightshayes).

TO DIG OR NOT TO DIG: If you choose, manure can be a lot of work. The classic approach is to spread your muck across the ground in late autumn and then dig it in before planting in spring. This is a good idea for ground that is new to cultivation or particularly heavy or compacted. However, if your soil is well worked you can simply let the winter weather do its thing or just lightly fork in. Rotavating in manure counteracts some of the benefits as it kills worms and increases the chances of compaction. Alternatively, you can simply apply wellrotted manure at any point from spring onwards in a pseudo no-dig gardening way as a top dressing. It will act as a mulch and still benefit the plants very nicely.

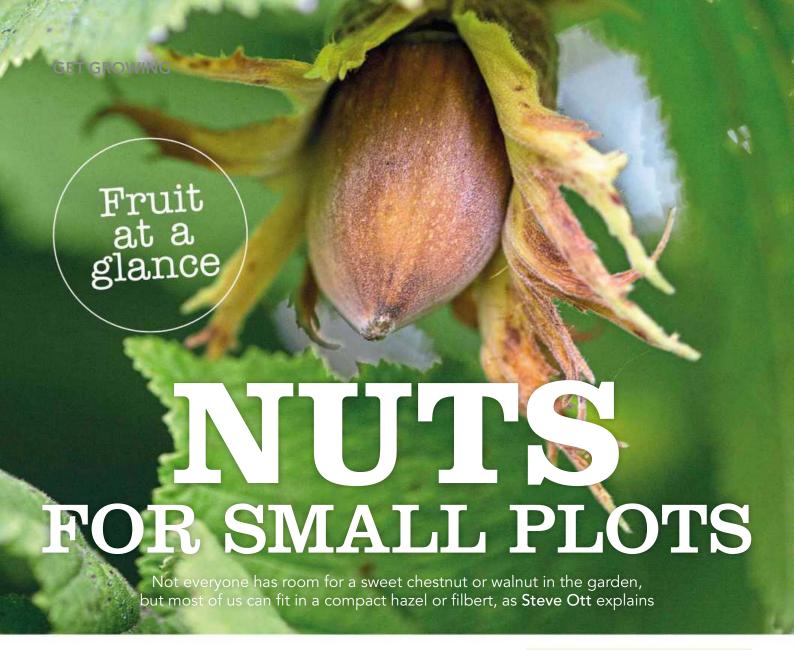
FURTHER INFORMATION & WHERE TO FIND YOUR MUCK!

- good way to get hold of manure, possibly for free, is to approach your local stable yards or farms directly. They often have existing muck heaps or will let you collect and bag up fresh manure for yourself for home composting. Some even let you pillage piles of well-rotted stuff for no charge if you bag it yourself. Others sell it for a small fee ready bagged. Try your phone directory to find local stables. Do check first, however, if the grazing or livestock are treated with pesticides as you may want to consider this when applying it to your soil.
- ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATIONS: Many allotment associations have standing arrangements with local farms or stables to deliver muck to your plot on request (generally for a nominal fee to cover delivery). Ask your plot representative or other plot holders where they get theirs.
- WWW.FARMYARD-MANURE-AND-MUSHROOM-COMPOST.CO.UK will deliver palleted sacks or dumpy bags of good quality, well-rotted horse manure (not mixed with anything else but straw).
- WWW.COMPOSTDIRECT.COM deliver good value bulk bags of mixed composted horse and cattle manure with some straw and sawdust from British sources.
- 'HOLY S**T: Managing manure to save mankind' by Gene Lodgson (ISBN-10: 1603582517) makes for a very entertaining education on this under-used resource.
- 'MANAGING MANURE' by Mark Kopecky, (ISBN-10: 1612124585) published March 2015, gives a comprehensive guide to all things manure.



One of the simplest methods of applying manure is to spread it over the soil in late autumn





rees are beautiful things to have in the garden, but we don't all have the space. Yet some of the most productive and pretty trees can be sneaked in as part of a hedge or into the back of the ornamental border without taking up much room. Hazels and filberts make themselves useful in other ways, too – the regular pruning required gives rise to wonderful long, flexible and durable poles to make into bean and plant supports, hurdles, canes and pea sticks.

The attractive leaves often turn bright yellow in autumn and the male flowers which appear in mid to late winter in the form of catkins are also highly attractive and an important early source of pollen for bees. One form, *Corylus avellana* 'Contorta', the contorted hazel, is a popular garden tree and at its most effective in winter when the bare, twisted stems can be

WHICH TREE IS RIGHT FOR ME?

seen at their best.

Hazelnuts and filberts are very closely related and look and taste similar, it is mainly the green or purple outer husk around the developing nut that differentiates

them – in the case of filberts it often completely covers the fruit but hazels protrude from the end and are easily visible. Botanically, hazelnuts (or cobnuts) are *Corylus avellana*, while filberts are *Corylus maxima*. There are several cultivated varieties of both including some lovely purpleleaved forms (see facing page).

In terms of size, shape and growing conditions however all are very similar and will thrive in a wide range of sites and soils providing they are moist but well drained. Although some can reach a height and spread of 12m (40ft), regular pruning ensures they remain a compact and manageable 3-4m (10-13ft).

SITE AND SOIL

All types will grow well in neutral to alkaline soil and in sun or partial shade (you will often see them growing among woodland trees where

trees where they form the under canopy). As a result they do

Did you know?

Hazels are long-lived plants, making 70-80 years if left to grow naturally, but much older trees are a common sight in our woodlands. The long, straight poles were once highly valued for building and other purposes and these plants would have originally been coppiced (cut close to ground level) to encourage them to produce more branches. This had the effect of extending their lives to several hundreds of years.

appreciate some shelter, but a wall or fence is a suitable alternative.

Plant bare-rooted trees from October to March or potted trees any time providing it is not too hot, dry or frozen. Dig in plenty of wellrotted garden compost or manure to improve drainage and moisture retention.

POLLINATION

These trees produce separate male (catkins) and female (tiny bud-like flowers) inflorescences on the same plant and rely on the wind to carry pollen from male to female. However, not all

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WATCH OUT FOR

- Squirrels are arch-enemy number one for the nut grower, although some birds and rodents are also partial. This is difficult to overcome and you may find that harvesting slightly unripe nuts is the only way to have some for yourself. Netting, sonic devices and bird scarers may help.
- Caterpillars of various moths will eat the leaves but usually only cause cosmetic damage.
- Nut weevils burrow into the developing nuts causing holes and maggoty fruit. Pick up fallen leaves and rake around the base of the tree to expose pests to frost and predators.



Public enemy number one - the squirrel!

VARIETY CHOICE

corylus avellana: The wild hazel is a lovely tree and very productive, not to mention relatively cheap. Also a great hedging plant much loved by wildlife.

C. MAXIMA 'PURPUREA': The beautiful purple-leaved filbert. Reasonably compact at around 2.4m (8ft) and also produces red husks and flowers.

C. AVELLANA 'COSFORD COB': a reliable self-fertile green-leaved variety that is also a good pollinator for neighbouring trees.

C. MAXIMA 'BUTLER': A reliable and heavy cropper. Ideal for growing with 'Cosford Cob' for effective pollination.



self-pollinate and most require another tree in the vicinity to ensure a crop. Planting several in a hedge, or having a few trees in the corner of the plot, is enough to guarantee a crop.

PRUNING

As mentioned, coppicing ensures that plants continue to produce a good supply of young, vigorous branches for bean poles etc., but in the garden, rather than cutting down all the shoots at once, it is better to remove up to a third of the oldest branches to leave a 2.5cm (1in) stub and the tree will quickly shoot again from the base. This is done in winter when the tree is dormant.

At the same time any over-long shoots or sideshoots can be tipped back and branches growing into the centre of the tree removed. If you are lucky enough to have space for a number of plants you may decide to completely coppice one in three every year, leaving the rest to grow on.

Where you are growing primarily for nuts a technique called brutting can be used to maximise yields; in summer look for long sideshoots produced on the current season's growth and snap them in half (don't cut) and leave the snapped end hanging. This encourages more flowers and allows air and light into the tree. These same shoots are shortened to three or four buds in winter.



The male flowers or catkins are produced in winter

IN THE KITCHEN

CREAMY RICE PUDDING FLAVOURED WITH JAM AND HAZELNUTS

Hazelnuts are little packets of energy, ideal for crushing and scattering over your morning cereal or over a creamy rice pudding with a blob of jam to add some crunch.



SUPPLIERS

READS NURSERY:

www.readsnursery.co.uk

R V ROGER: www.rvroger.co.uk

POMONA FRUITS: www.pomonafruits.co.uk

KEN MUIR: www.kenmuir.co.uk

MORE NUT-BASED TREATS FOR YOUR PLOT OR GARDEN

ALMONDS

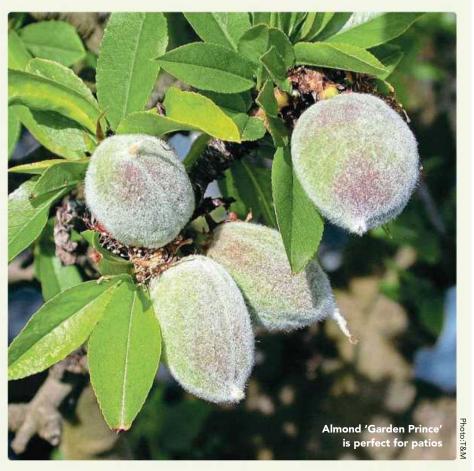
Unlike filberts and hazels, which are more shrubby in appearance, almonds are very definitely trees and very pretty ones at that. Reasonably compact when grafted to the plum rootstock St Julien A (they are closely related to plums and peaches), they will usually reach around 3.5m (11½ft) in height and spread after 5-10 years, so are small enough for most gardens.

Almonds flower splendidly in March and April and are often covered in pink blossom which makes them well worth growing even without the bonus of fruit. However, young trees will crop only lightly in their second year after planting, with 'proper' crops following from the third year onwards.

It was mentioned above that as part of the large prunus family they are closely related to plums and they do suffer from a number of the same pests and diseases, the most serious of which is silver leaf. As with plums this can be avoided by keeping pruning to an absolute minimum and even then restricting it to summer when the sap is flowing to keep the disease spores out of the open wounds.

Good varieties to look out for are the self-fertile 'Robijn' – probably the most commonly available. However, you may also be offered the variety 'Ingrid' or simply the common almond *Prunus dulcis*. The latter when sold ungrafted makes a handsome tree, but will reach up to 10m (33ft), so is not ideal for a small plot. 'Ingrid' is another self-fertile tree with beautiful pink blossom. It has good resistance to peach leaf curl, but does not generally produce as heavy crops as 'Robijn'.

Although almond trees are very hardy, the blossom is prone to frost damage so should not be planted in a frost pocket or very cold or exposed site and do require a warm,



dry summer to fruit well. 'Robijn' flowers a little later than other varieties so is best if growing further north.

Thanks to some clever breeding and the use of dwarf rootstocks you can now grow an almond tree on your patio. 'Garden Prince' grows to just 1.2m (4ft) thanks to the peach seedling dwarfing rootstock and like its larger cousins is self-fertile and has lovely pink spring blossom. It will start cropping after approximately three years.





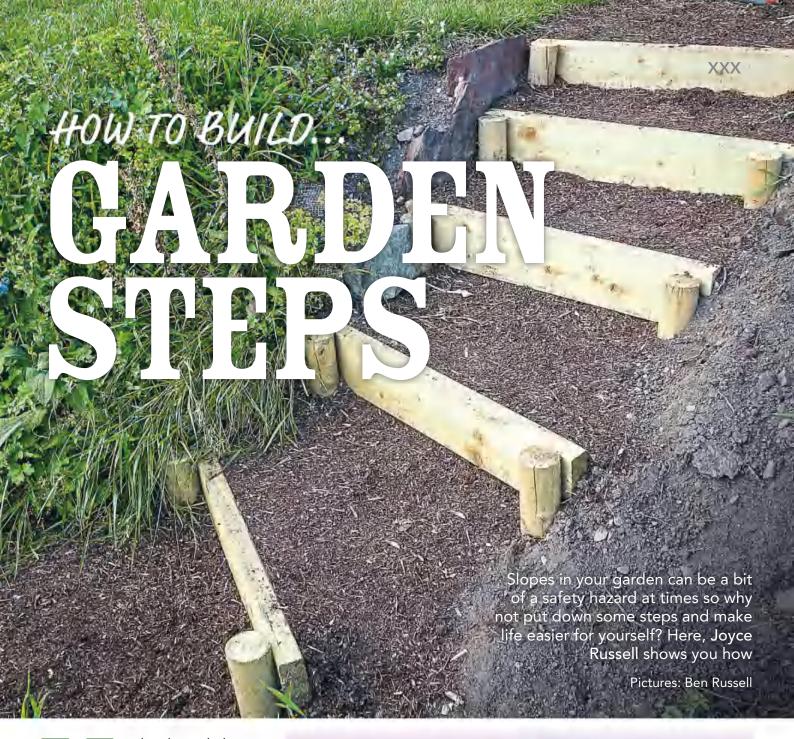
COMPACT-ISH WALNUTS

Having said overleaf that despite being very beautiful trees walnuts are too large for most UK gardens, there is a slightly more compact option you might like to try. The variety 'Lara' is a little more compact than its common cousin, 'only' reaching a height and spread of around 12m x 9m (39ft x 29ft). Another variety, 'Broadview', is also a little more compact than the common walnut. Both are grafted on to Juglans regia rootstock which gives them their comparatively compact habit.



SUPPLIERS

See the fruit tree specialists page 65. plus: Thompson & Morgan; www.thompson-morgan.com



y garden is large and it has more slopes than most. For years I warned people to take it easy down one particular stretch, where it was slippery when wet and laced with foot-tripping tree roots. I'd looked and thought 'steps would be good' more often than I like to confess. There was something stopping me from getting down to that project and I expect a lot of gardeners may have similar issues.

Large projects can be daunting at the best of times but sometimes the thoughts are worse than the task. Making garden steps isn't hard at all provided you can cope with the digging involved. Now, I like digging so all I had to do was break the rest of the job down into simple stages.

I made steps with wooden risers and a chipping fill. The principles of marking out, digging and getting an even rise are the same however, whatever materials you choose to use. The main word of caution is to put in any necessary work to make the risers completely firm, and the step as level and safe as possible.

MATERIAL & TOOLS

The materials will vary according to the size of your steps, but for these ones you need two posts per step and a board of the width that you want the steps to be. I used reclaimed oak for my steps: this is hard, slow to rot, and it has an aged look.

Durable timbers such as chestnut or larch are other options, as are pressure treated timber, old railway sleepers etc. You will need to survey the site (see stage 2) in order to decide the number of steps to fit into the slope.

- The posts are 5cm square and 45cm long, with a pointed end
- The boards (risers) are 5cm x 15cm x 75cm
- 70mm x 5mm stainless steel screws (two per post)
- Chippings or suitable fill material
- Scraps of timber



■ Strong digging tools (mattock, spade, shovel etc.), a straight crowbar, a lump-hammer or sledgehammer, level, drill, 5.5mm and 4mm drill bits, screwdriver, string, tape measure.

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STEP BY STEP HOW TO BUILD GARDEN STEPS

STAGE 1: EYEBALL AND HOLD YOUR NERVE

So you are going to do this, but first you need to get a rough idea of what you want.

Decide where the steps will start and where they will end.

Lay a straight piece of scrap timber (or pipe, or cardboard strip) to mark roughly where you think each step should go. Imagine the scrap timber is the front edge of the step. Do you want a curve in the flight of steps, or will they run straight?

This is the point where your design decisions are made so don't rush it.

STAGE 2: SURVEY THE SITE

The next bit may sound technical, but it really isn't. Get someone else to help if needed.

You need to know the difference in height from the top step, to the bottom. This can be done by holding a straight length of timber (or a tight level string) so one end is held firm, at the highest point, and the other is held level above the lowest point. Measure the difference in height from ground to timber. Divide this figure by the width of the boards you will use: this will tell how many steps of that size you can fit in. Choose your step height carefully so it isn't too high to step up.

Now you can use the same principle to mark where the front of each step will go. You can use a long level if you have one, or a piece of timber with a level on top. Measure 15cm up from the ground - where the level, or timber, hits against the slope is where the next step will go. Adjust the markers, laid at stage 1, to reflect this more accurate positioning.

Stand back and look: you can still decide to move steps closer, or further apart, to get what you want.

STAGE 3: PEGS AND STRING

You are going to dig soon, so you need to make a laying-out system that won't be dislodged.

Knock sticks into the ground about 30cm out from each end of the markers laid on the ground. The sticks should be beyond the area where you are going to dig and will allow you to eyeball at any point and see if you are digging straight. Stretch string between the sticks if it helps you to dig to a neater edge.

STAGE 4: FIX POSTS TO BOARDS

Use a 5.5mm drill bit to drill two clearance holes in each post. These go 20mm and 110mm from the top of each post.

The posts will be fitted to the back of the boards. Place them 20mm in from the sides and 20mm down from the top edge of the board.

Use a screw, or nail, to mark through the clearance holes on to the back of the boards. Pilot holes can then be drilled at these points using the 4mm drill bit.

Screw the posts to the boards through the drilled holes.









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STAGE 5: CLEAR FOR THE TOP STEP

Start to dig out for the top step and work your way down. Peel back edges and save any green sods, then dig as deep as you need to in order to hit something solid underneath. On my site this involved using a mattock to chop through some tree roots, but I tried not to damage too many or harm the trees. I soon hit a rock layer to give a solid foundation without digging too far. Keep an eye on your markers and keep the dug section as level and straight as you can.

Use the crowbar to make holes in the ground where the posts will go, then position the top board.

STAGE 6: KNOCK IN POSTS

Use a scrap block of wood to protect the top of the post when knocking it down into the ground. It may take a bit of walloping, but try to keep the posts as upright and straight as possible.

STAGE 7: OPTIONAL BOTTOM STEP

You may simply step off on to grass, or a path, at the bottom step, or you may want to make a step that is flush with the ground. I chose the latter and made a simple wooden frame to contain the bottom step at ground level.

STAGE 8: MORE STEPS

Keep digging and fitting boards as you progress down the flight of steps.

You can choose whether to aim for a level that is flush with the ground to either side, or that is raised above it.

STAGE 9: FILLING IN

You can now fill in the steps. Use slightly larger stones, or hardcore, underneath (you can throw in any small stones that you found while digging). The top should be a finer material such as stone chippings. This will filter down between any gaps in the lower layer, as well as spreading out to give a neat covering.





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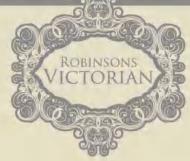
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SWEDES ON TEST at ROSEMOOR



The judges assess the 14 varieties on trial

Swedes are something of a 'Marmite' vegetable – you love them or hate them, says **Colin Randel**, member of the RHS Vegetable Trials Assessment Panel, as he reports on the most recent Award of Garden Merit (AGM) swede trials in North Devon

wedes have had a rather chequered history. We over-fifties recall the 'pleasure' of school dinners which guaranteed dollops of stringy, bitter lumps on the plate. Huge advances have taken place since then and swedes have virtually all-the-year-round availability in the supermarket. Amazingly, swedes are a popular growing choice and though far from easy to grow in small gardens, they are successful on the allotment.

Swedes do not transplant well from modules and are one of the few brassicas that demand direct sowing. If summer swedes are desired, too early a sowing (before mid-April) may lead to premature flowering (bolting) if temperatures are low.

Sowing mid-May to early June for October to post-Christmas harvests is more reliable.

THE TRIALS

Swedes grow best in areas with plenty of moisture as this is essential to promote strong roots.

Commercial production centres on Scotland,

Wales and the South West, so its Devon location is why Royal Horticultural Society Garden Rosemoor hosted this Award of Garden Merit (AGM) trial in 2014 – the first for swedes since 2002.

An area was raked and prepared to sow the trial. There were 14 cultivars. Seeds were sown thinly on June 5 and thinned on June 25. Several cultivars suffered to a variable extent from root rot and subsequent pest damage which was identified as slugs and millipedes.

The damage was observed as the trial was recorded on October 24 in readiness for lifting and storing the roots in the cool apple store on October 25. The AGM assessments did not take place until November 20, with the roots



AWARD-WINNING VARIETIES

'GOWRIE' – Purple skinned with yellow flesh, uniform, good-sized roots showing very little pest/disease damage. Available from Mr Fothergill's.



'VIRTUE' – Smooth, purple-skinned with yellow flesh, short necked, uniformly sized roots. Available from Thompson & Morgan.



WHAT IS AN AGM?

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Award of Garden Merit (AGM) is given to plants that perform reliably in the garden. The plants are triall at an RHS garden, and judg forum of horticultural exper review, plants can have their

garden. The plants are trialled, usually at an RHS garden, and judged by a forum of horticultural experts. At each review, plants can have their AGM status confirmed or removed. The AGM list currently contains more that 7500 plants. For more information visit: www.rhs.org.uk/plants/trials-awards

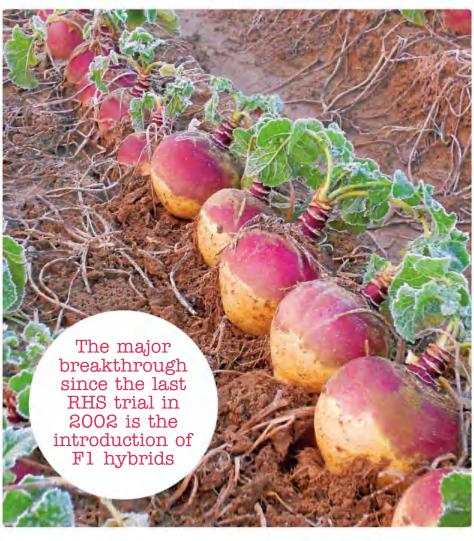
displayed in a polytunnel. The root colour had faded considerably since lifting – swedes hold a better colour when left in the soil.

JUDGING CRITERIA

Factors that were taken into consideration when judging were: skin and flesh colour, root size and uniformity, storage, pest and disease resistance.

AGM RESULTS

Two of the 14 cultivars, 'Gowrie' and 'Virtue', were awarded an AGM; two others, 'Brora' and 'Magres' had their previous AGM in 2002 reconfirmed. Two cultivars from 2002 had their AGM rescinded – 'Ruby' and 'Wilhelmsburger' (both superseded). The F1 cultivars 'Tweed' and 'Tyne' performed poorly and showed internal rot/flesh discolouration compared to 'Gowrie', 'Brora' and 'Virtue'.



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GROWING GUIDES

WEBSITES & BLOGS FOR ALLOTMENT GARDENERS BY TONY FLANAGAN

WILD ABOUT FOOD

www.wildfooduk.com

Long before the days of shops around the corner and big supermarkets, people looked more to the environment around them to gather food, especially if it was free. Most of us have probably lost touch with what's out there in the fields, woods and hedgerows but if you want to brush up on your foraging skills – or even take a course – this site is for you. It provides a list of where you can take foraging courses, or you can even book a private one (for a hen or stag party even – now there's an interesting concept!). The wild mushroom guide is particular helpful, with comprehensive entries of mushrooms both edible and poisonous (and pictures, thankfully, to help you determine which is which), and the hedgerow guide is just as illuminating. This site exudes enthusiasm, is crisp in appearance and easy to navigate. Happy foraging!





CLAIRE'S ALLOTMENT

www.clairesallotment.wordpress.com

It's good to see a blog that feels like it's written with dirt-caked fingers, and I mean this in the nicest possible way. With this blog you get the feeling that the writer's contact with the soil is never far away as entries are impressively regular, going as far back as 2010. It's all the everyday stuff about what someone does on their allotment – observations about the weather, her crops, her successes and failures, who she chats to and what she chats about. There may be

trivia in there but it's interesting trivia, and there's plenty of good advice too with videos on sowing, growing and harvesting – her 21 butternut squash, for example, including 'the rather rude one'. Definitely one of the more engaging and informative blogs around.



TOOLSOME TWOSOME

www.wilkinsonsword-tools.co.uk www.wolfgarten-tools.co.uk

Garden tool manufacturers Wilkinson Sword and WOLF-Garten have united to promote accessible gardening. In a new campaign, gardening writer and blogger Niki Preston and 14-year-old Lucas Hatch, who won the RHS Young Gardener of the Year award in 2012, are putting gardening tools through their paces. Niki's 'Two Fingered Gardener' blog documents her gardening exploits and her experiences of gardening with a disability, and in the case of Lucas it's good to get a young gardener's perspective on things. These blogs are useful if you want to get a review of a product you might be thinking of buying. Both blogs can be accessed through the home page of the respective websites. (For Niki click on the 'BLOG' tab; for Lucas click on the 'NEWS' tab)





CHICKEN & EGG

Andy Cawthray and James Hermes Ivy Press £14.99

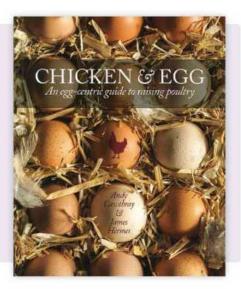
Well this won't answer the eternal question about which came first, the chicken or the egg, but this 'eggcentric guide to raising poultry' as the subtitle goes will tell you just about everything else you need to know. Part one serves as an introduction to the history of chickens, the science of egg formation and what you need to feed chickens to produce the best eggs. Part two offers a guide to individual breeds so you know the difference between a Legbar and a Leghorn, with each entry supported by colourful illustrations of both egg and bird, and notes on care

and temperament among other things. Part three is the practical part, how to get started, choosing a hen house, laying and brooding, diet and health. This is a comprehensive and informative guide.

WHO IS IT FOR?

Beginners but established hen keepers will benefit from it just as much.





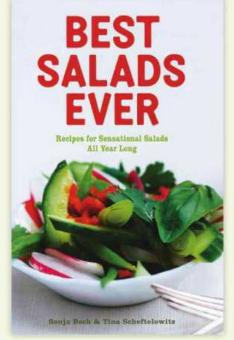
KG BOOKSHELF

OUR ROUNDUP OF SOME OF THE BEST BOOKS FOR GARDENERS

BEST SALADS EVER

Sonja Bock and Tina Scheftelowitz Grub Street £14.99

Salads have come a long way from a few leaves of lettuce, a couple of tomatoes, sliced cucumber and some spring onions slapped on a plate. They have now become something of an art form. The book's starting point is to give the reader notes on a wide range of



special ingredients which will help to give your salads that something extra – ground spices, balsamic vinegar, dried herbs, tahini and quinoa, and so on, all of which are available from most supermarkets. The book also includes a section of tips and tricks before moving on to the recipes themselves. These are divided into two sections, 'Superb Salads' and 'Brilliant Buffets', so catering for small or larger groups. The photographs of recipes look positively mouth-watering and there is a range of colourful and lively design features. This recipe book aims to inspire, and it does.

WHO IS IT FOR? Salad fans looking to do much, much more.



THE CRAFTED GARDEN

Louise Curley Frances Lincoln £16.99

If you're into crafting, or would like to be, this very attractively illustrated book is brimming with ideas. Organised according to the four seasons, each section shows you how to make beautiful objects



from what you can forage or from what is growing in your garden. There are between eight and 11 mini projects per section. The spring section, for example, shows you how to make a sealed terrarium, listing what items you will need, what plants to use, preparing the container and planting up. Summer projects include making edible dinner decorations, a hessian plant pouch and a floral fascinator. The autumn section includes making squash vases and hanging gardens, and the winter section has natural bauble, wreath and present decoration projects. There are also topics which will be of interest to growers, such as key plants for the various projects, seed saving and bulb forcing. In all, this is a well-designed book with a good range of creative projects suitable for both beginners or more experienced crafters.

WHO IS IT FOR? Those interested in making beautiful objects using nature's treasure trove.



Reviews by Tony Flanagan

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We'll also send you one packet each of salad leaves 'Mesclun Mixed', lettuce 'Salad Bowl Mixed', spring onion 'Ishikura' and herb chives.



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'INTERNATIONAL KIDNEY' (second early) - The famous 'Jersey Royal', an outstanding salad type. Harvest from July. 'ANYA' (second early) – Another great salad type with a distinct nutty flavour which is very highly regarded. Harvest from

'DESIRÉE' (maincrop) – This red-skinned type performs well in any soil and the waxy, yellow flesh has a good flavour. Harvest from late August.

'CARA' (maincrop) - A favourite with D.T. Brown customers, this late maincrop provides heavy yields of smooth-skinned spuds which are great mashed or baked. Harvest from September.

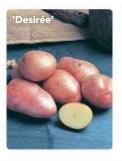
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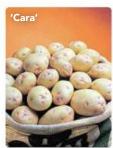












BLIGHT RESISTANT POTATO COLLECTION

Blight can be the scourge of any veg gardener; treating the problem is almost impossible, so choosing varieties which show resistance is the best form of defence. First bred in Hungary, the Sarpo family of potatoes come with an excellent



reputation for blight resistance. Breeding now continues in the UK and with blight resistance now established, the focus has shifted to taste and flavour. This season we are featuring three of these recently introduced varieties, and we're sure you'll be as impressed by the results

'SARPO KIFLI' (early maincrop) - This salad type has cream, waxy-fleshed tubers with a great new potato flavour.

'SARPO BLUE DANUBE' (early maincrop) - This floury spud is great for creating mouthwatering roasties that are crispy on the outside, and light and fluffy on the inside. 'SARPO AXONA' (late maincrop) - A pink-skinned, creamy-fleshed spud producing heavy yields of large tubers that make outstanding 'bakers'.

Buy ANY 1.5kg pack for just £5.95 - Save 20% when you buy ANY 3 packs.



SPRING PLANTING GARLIC COLLECTION

There's still time to get your garlic planted and we've selected three varieties we think are more suited to spring planting. You'll receive:

'CARCASSONE WIGHT' (2 bulbs) – This variety comes out top in trials as the best of the hardneck varieties. Pink-skinned, fragrant cloves which keep their flavour when cooked.

ELEPHANT GARLIC (10 cloves) – Supersized cloves with a mild, sweet flavour which are perfect for eating raw or roasting whole.

'SOLENT WIGHT' (2 bulbs) – A superb softneck strain yielding large bulbs, which keep extremely well.

The collection costs just £16.85, saving you £3 on the normal catalogue prices.





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SPRING PLANTING ONION COLLECTION

The mainstay of any garden or allotment. We're offering a collection of three varieties, 250g weight of each, which will give you bumper crops. The varieties include the semi-round 'Centurion', the reliable and popular 'Sturon' and the spherical 'Hercules'. All have won the prestigious Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society.

The collection costs just £7.85, saving you £2 on the normal catalogue prices.



SPRING PLANTING ONION, GARLIC & SHALLOT COLLECTION

No allotment is complete without a few onions, garlic or shallots – they are a key ingredient in so many dishes. We've selected three of the highest yielding, spring-planting varieties:

GARLIC 'PICARDY WIGHT' (2 bulbs) – This softneck variety copes really well with cooler and wetter conditions and will grow in all areas of the UK. Plump and juicy cloves full of flavour.

ONION 'STUTTGARTER GIANT' (250g) – Well known and reliable, gives an excellent crop of flat onions which store very well.

SHALLOT 'BISTRO' (500g) – Gives an excellent crop of fairly mild, rich golden bulbs.

Buy the collection for just £9.85 and save £2 on the individual prices.



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Call the credit card and debit card order hotline on 0845 371 0532 quoting KG16JAN (open 8am to 8pm, seven days a week). Only orders above £10 by phone please. Or send a cheque made payable to D. T. Brown Seeds to: Kitchen Garden January Offers (KG16JAN), D.T. Brown Seeds, Western Avenue, Matrix Park, Chorley, Lancs PR7 7NB. All items despatched from mid January.

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	Potato 'Accent' (47769)	£4.95	
	Potato 'International Kidney' (41687)	£4.95	
	Potato 'Anya' (42057)	£4.95	
	Potato 'Desiree' (41213)	£4.95	
	Potato 'Cara' (41192)	£4.95	
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	Potato 'Sarpo Kifli' (49241)	£5.95	
	Potato 'Sarpo Blue Danube' (49240)	£5.95	
	Potato 'Sarpo Axona' (49239)	£5.95	
	Any 3 of the above potato packs (please indicate in left column)	£14.28	
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PRODUCT REVIEWS

GREENHOUSE HEATERS

If you want to keep your overwintering plants warm or give young seedlings and young plants a burst of spring heat then take a look at the range of greenhouse heaters available



MARVEL PARAFFIN GREENHOUSE HEATER (MAJOR)

This paraffin heater is suitable for 6ft or 8ft greenhouses. It has a 3.1 litre tank with a maximum heat 2100BTUs/hr (650W approx.). The burning duration is 50-70 hours.



There are three sizes, mini, major (this one) and ultimate.

NORFOLK GREENHOUSES www.norfolk-greenhouses.co.uk PRODUCT CODE: GHHESMMAJR

PRICE: £35





KG verdict

Easy to assemble and has nice features such as a twin wick and wick snuffer. Ideal for providing frost protection to a small greenhouse/polytunnel.







HOTBOX ELITE FAN HEATER

This electric fan heater has a thermostatic control though the fan will continue to circulate air even after the heat supply is cut. The maximum heat output is 2.8kW and the heater is 41cm x 22cm in size.

THE GREENHOUSE PEOPLE

www.greenhousepeople.co.uk **PRODUCT CODE: 346** PRICE GUIDE: £199

KG verdict

Basically, all you need to do is plug it in and off you go. The dial has a good temperature range and there is a fan-only option for air circulation. A good one for larger greenhouses/polytunnels.







THE PARASENE BIG RED HEATER

This heater has a 4-litre fuel tank and will last for up to 16 hours on a single fill-up. Recommended for use in greenhouses of up to 14 square metres in size, it has a carry handle and has a power output of 2.5kW.

GARDEN ESSENTIALS

www.gardenessentials.co.uk PRODUCT CODE: 25591A

PRICE: £42.50

KG verdict

This came ready assembled so apart from pouring in some paraffin it was ready to go. I was impressed with the capacity of this and how attractive it looks, a thing of beauty as well as functional.







WARMAX PARAFFIN **HEATER ANTIFROST**

This has a 1.7-litre tank and will keep your cold frame or a 2sq m area of your greenhouse frost free for up to 10 days before the need for a refill.

GARDENING NATURALLY

www.gardening-naturally.com PRODUCT CODE: WPHA **PRICE:** £19.99

KG verdict

This is simplicity itself. It took less than a minute to put it together and get it going. Gives out a steady heat and is perfect as an anti-frost heater for the small greenhouse or cold frame.





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WHAT TO BUY | GREENHOUSE HEATERS



PARASENE ANTI-FROST HEATER

This circular heater can be used in a greenhouse or cold frame and is ideal for staving off frost and keeping plants and seedlings warm. It has a long-lasting burning time of up to 14 days with one fill of fuel.

MARSHALLS

www.marshalls-seeds.co.uk **PRODUCT CODE:** 1090-2086

PRICE: £19.99



Easy to assemble and maintain, this little heater is ideal for offering frost protection in small spaces such as mini greenhouses.







SLIMLINE ECO HEATER

These electric tubular heaters are available in 50cm, 1m and 1.5m lengths (approx. 19in-5ft). They have an automatic heat sensitive cut-out and built-in thermostat. All are supplied with a 1.5m (5ft) long mains cable and fitted plug.

HARROD HORTICULTURAL

www.harrodhorticultural.com **PRODUCT CODE:** GHE-031 **PRICE:** £31.95 (50cm)

KG verdict

This is a good product for a small greenhouse, garden shed or large cold frame. Very easy to assemble and can be mounted or be free-standing.







PARASENE COLD-FRAME HEATER

This little paraffin heater is designed to provide very localised heat in small spaces. It comes with an integral hanger and the $\frac{1}{2}$ litre tank should give approximately three days of continuous burning.

WIDELY AVAILABLE

Offered online and at garden centres.

MODEL NO: 560 **PRICE:** £12.99

KG verdict

A handy and economical little heater to help keep the frost from early sowings in small spaces. Good value for money considering its price.









Many things have changed since 1973, but one thing that has remained the same is our dedication to providing good quality and affordable gardening products, designed, manufactured and built in the UK. With many greenhouse companies fighting for your valuable money, we don't promise to be anything we are not. We understand that life can be expensive, and by keeping our products affordable, means that everyone has the opportunity to "grow their own", eat healthily, and enjoy the wonderful hobby and lifestyle that is gardening.

NOW INCLUDES FREE DELIVERY



Extend your growing season all year round with a Norfolk Greenhouses paraffin heater. Efficient and economical to run,

SPACESAVER



Sturdy construction, galvanised steel frame clad with the "Ultimate Glazing System". Fit to a wall or fence, has 3 levels of rails and a single sliding door for easy access.

HOUSING



ideal as a plant house or just to propogate your seeds, our Plant Houses are a popular choice with Gardeners. Constructed with a galvanised steel frame and clad with twinwall top, sides and base.



Our Ultimate Greenhouses offer sturdy construction, using galvanised steel frames, clad with the "Ultimate Glazing System" and incorporates a green decorative trim. All sizes have a rear sliding vent and double sliding doors giving easy access for wheel barrows or wheel chairs.

CLOCHES



Our cloches are manufactured with a galvanised steel frame and "clear as glass" UPVC safety glazing. They are ideal for protecting early vegetables or young plants.

COLD FRAMES

This cold frame is constructed from galvanised steel frame and twinwall side panels. The sliding doors on top for easy access are made from "clear as glass" UPVC safety glazing.

CANOPIES



The inexpensive answer to creating a protective area over an exposed outside door, this canopy will offer protection from the elements all year round. Constructed from UPVC and twinwall roof.

PORCHES



Sturdy box section uPVC framework makes a rigid structure clad with uPVC hollow air-space insulation cladding board. The roof panels are our translucent twinwall for maximum light.

CARPORTS



Our carports offer great value for money whilst offering protection for both you and your vehicle all year round. The carpo for both you and your vehicle all year round. The carport is manufactured from UPVC framework and translucent PVC roof.

Claim your 5%* discount offer by quoting the code below either by phone or via our website.

£39

KGJANGT * Discount valid until 31st Jan 2016

All products are supplied fiat packed for DIY assembly. All sizes are approx. Please allow up to 5 days for delivery. We offer a 14 dey money back period – you must write to us or fax customer services on (01638 714715) to return any goods. (which must be unused and in original packaging) For Terms and Conditions please visit our website or call 01638 713418 or to request one of our free brochures.

uses, Chiswick Avenue Ind. Est, Mildenhall. Suffolk IP28 7AZ*

Please note we do not refund delivery charges on returns. Our factory showground is open Monday - Friday '9am - 5pm (closed bank holidays) phone 01638 713418

For our full range of products call 01638 713418 or vistit our website www.norfolk-greenhouses.co.uk

GIVEAWAYS

WORTH OVER £903

TO ENTER OUR GIVEAWAYS SEE PAGE 93 OR VISIT THE KG WEBSITE

GROW ORGANIC

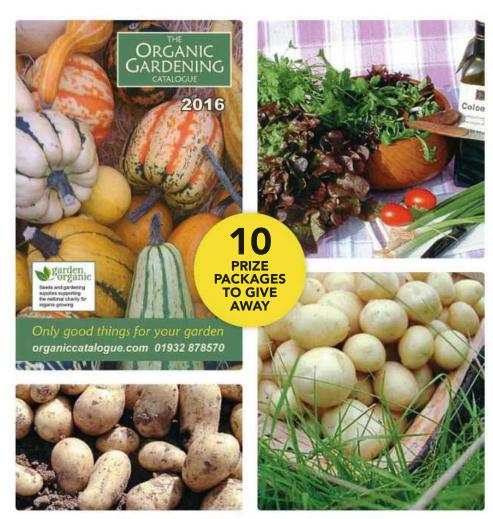
The Organic Gardening Catalogue – purveyor of 'only good things for your garden' – offers a comprehensive range of seeds and gardening supplies, with all purchases helping to support Garden Organic, the national charity for organic growing.

Among the 50-plus new seed varieties in this year's catalogue, its 'Top Ten Picks for 2016' include carrot 'Cosmic Purple', which boasts colour that won't fade on cooking, celery 'Peppermint Stick', with vibrant pink and white candy-striped stalks and corn salad 'Baron', a lamb's lettuce for all seasons. Other highlights include gherkin 'Salt and Pepper', a mildflavoured white pickling cucumber and squash 'Honeynut', a butternut with portion-sized fruit.

Ten lucky winners will receive a Waxy Salad Potatoes Collection, which contains 1.5kg of each of 'Charlotte', 'Nicola', 'Maris Peer' and 'Milva' and a Gourmet Salads Collection of nine packets of seed offering a blend of colours, tastes and textures. They'll also get a 250ml bottle of Chase SM3 Organic Seaweed Extract, packed full of seaweed's naturally occurring growth compounds for stronger, healthier plants and a bigger harvest.

Call 01932 878570 for your copy of the 2016 catalogue or visit www.organiccatalogue. com to shop online.

We have 10 Organic Gardening Catalogue prize packages worth £33.55 to give away.



INDUSTRIAL STYLE FOR YOUR GARDEN

Industrial design company BARAK'7 has expanded its garden furniture range. Rather than the usual plastics and metals, BARAK'7 uses reclaimed wood and metal and vintage materials to give each piece individual character, allowing you to add style and personality to your outdoor space.

The new foldable Garden Table and Chair set is perfect for a patio or balcony. Available in a silver or carbon finish, it is robust enough to stay outside all year round, and the imperfections in the reclaimed wood and metal make each piece unique. The Garden Table is priced at £149, while each Garden Chair costs £119.

The BARAK'7 range takes inspiration from architecture, machinery and flea markets in the industrial areas of Paris and Brussels. Each piece is lovingly handmade, so no two are identical. The range includes tables, chairs, stools, lamps and mirrors as well as furniture for offices, bathrooms and the garden.

BARAK'7 is offering KG readers a 10% discount on any order placed before January 30, 2016 – just quote code 'KITCHENGARDEN'. Find out more and view the full range at www. barak7.co.uk

We have one Garden Table and Chair set, worth a total of £268, to give away.



STEP OUT IN STYLE!

Warm, dry feet can make all the difference to winter gardening, and TheWellyShop.com has a huge range of fun and fashionable wellies to put a spring in your step and let you combine practicality with style.

The site offers traditional wellies, fashion wellies, vintagestyle wellies, ankle wellies, safety wellies, wide calf wellies, kids' wellies and more, as well as UGGstyle boots, snow boots, clogs and welly socks. Brands include Hunter, Aigle, Le Chameau, Timberland, Evercreatures and The Muck Boot Co.

For lovers of classic wellies, Hunter Original Tall Wellington Boots (£85) come in a range of 16 colours (including, if you insist, black and olive green). They're also available in a lovely floral design in association with the RHS. The new Aigle Parcours 2 (£114.99), billed as 'the ultimate walking wellie', has tripledensity shock-absorbing soles. Evercreatures' fashionable range includes Floral Blue and Yellow, Cool Pink, Cow Print and Black

Croc designs (£36/£37.99). And for the young at heart, there are SoleM8 Leapfrog adult frog wellies (£29.99) and Raindrop Rapture, Funky Fish and Manic Mushroom designs (£69.99).

See the full range at www. thewellyshop.com

We have six £50 TheWellyShop.com vouchers to give away.



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www.mortonsmediagroup.com



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∠ SEEDS & TWINE

Get ready for sowing with this two-in-one pack,
Prop it 'n' Crop it. It combines a selection of Thomas
Etty branded seed packets and Twool's wool garden
twine. Seeds available are tomato, runner bean, purple pea,
French bean, sunflower and sweet pea.

PRICE: £5.95 (one seed packet and twine) www.twool.co.uk

GARDEN STORE

OUR ROUNDUP OF THE LATEST PRODUCTS AND SERVICES FOR KITCHEN GARDENERS

MAGICAL MASH 14

If mashed potatoes are your thing then this Masha might be of interest. The rotor blade pushes food through a perforated foot to create lump-free mash in no more than 20 seconds. It has a simple on/off control and comes with an aerator attachment which can also be used for making light, fluffy meringues, cake mix, batter and whipped cream.

PRICE: £34.99 www.lakeland.co.uk





PLANTERS IN TIERS ∠

These are made from galvanised steel and aluminium then powder coated to protect from rusting or rotting. There are two- or threetiered planters with different text options. Available in 10 colours.

PRICE: £279 (two-tiered) www.amelie-design.co.uk

CREATE A CRATE

These crates are made from FSC sustainably sourced wood, come in a wide selection of colours and can be used for a variety of purposes. The handles are contoured for easy lifting and you can personalise your own message. These containers are offered with a wide range of size and slat choices.



YI POTS IN COLOUR

These Ombré Plant Pots and Herb Pots come in three colours: Sea Green, Grey and Raspberry. The largest pot is 18cm diameter x 12.5cm high (7in x 5in), the smallest 10cm diameter x 9cm high (4in x $3\frac{1}{2}$ in), with five pots per pack. Available online and from garden centres.

PRICE: RRP £19.95 – five pots per pack www.burgonandball.com



U CITRUS ZING

Citrus Zinger Sport is a bottle with a built-in juicer. It works by squeezing fresh fruit into the base and then adding water. Simple and easy to use.

> PRICE 16.99 www.firebox.com

TAKING THE LOAD &

This 350-litre Barrow Trailer is one of a new range. Built of durable, singleskinned, heavy duty plastic moulding that will not corrode, it can move up to four times the load of a normal barrow. It is also available in 200 and 135-litre sizes.

PRICE: £325 (350 LITRE) www.vigopresses.co.uk





1 EASY DOES IT

For gardening newbies, Mr Fothergill's GroTray is a compact propagation system which only needs watering once prior to germination, and comprises a growing tray, compost disc, vegetable seed and a propagation bag. The six varieties available include two tomato varieties, a chilli pepper, sweet pepper, courgette and cucumber.

PRICE: £3.99 www.mr-fothergills.co.uk



PROTECT YOUR PLANTS **∠**

Agriframes Somerset Cloche Hoops offer flexibility as well as protection. With a hard-wearing, olive green finish, these hoops come in three different sizes and can be used with net, fleece or polythene to create an effective frame to prevent damage from weather or pests.

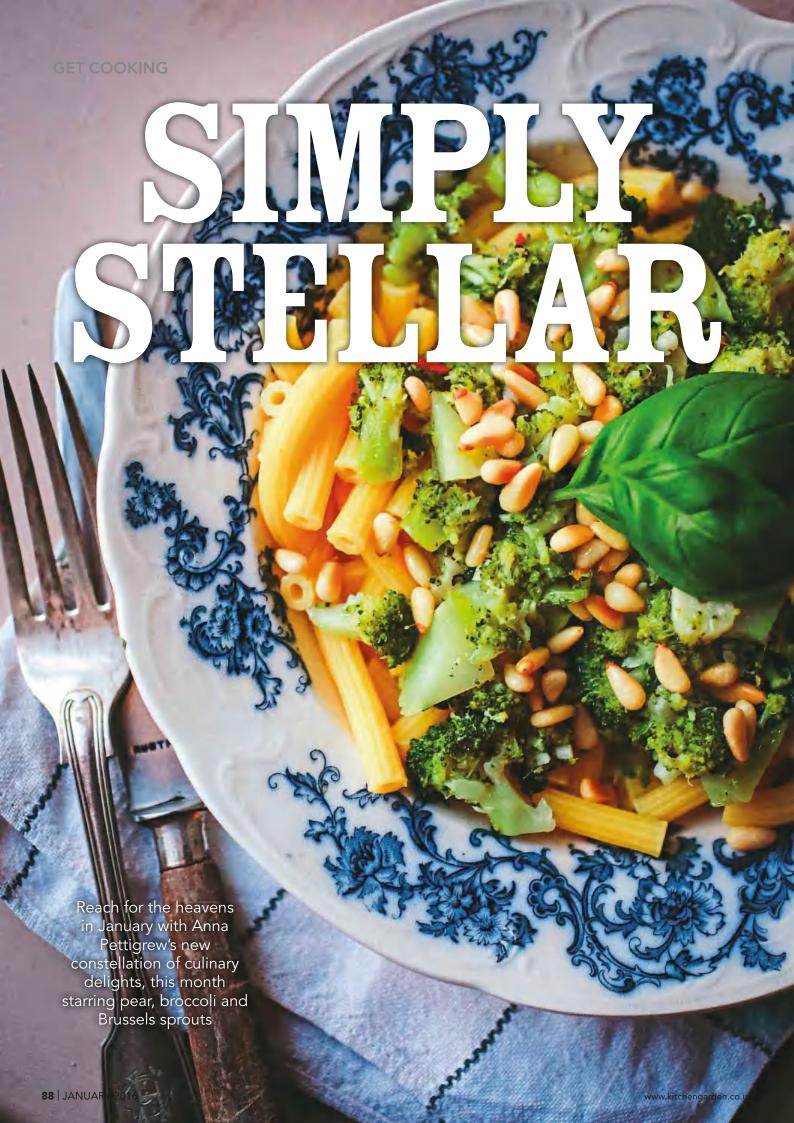
PRICE: £7/£8.50/£10 each (depending on size) www.agriframes.co.uk



SHOOTING ROOTS **▼**

These Air-Pot containers are made from recycled plastic. Numerous air holes around the container attract roots which, on contact with the air, are 'pruned', in effect. This stimulates further root growth and thereby an increased take-up of water and nutrient.

PRICE: from £8.75 www.air-pot.com



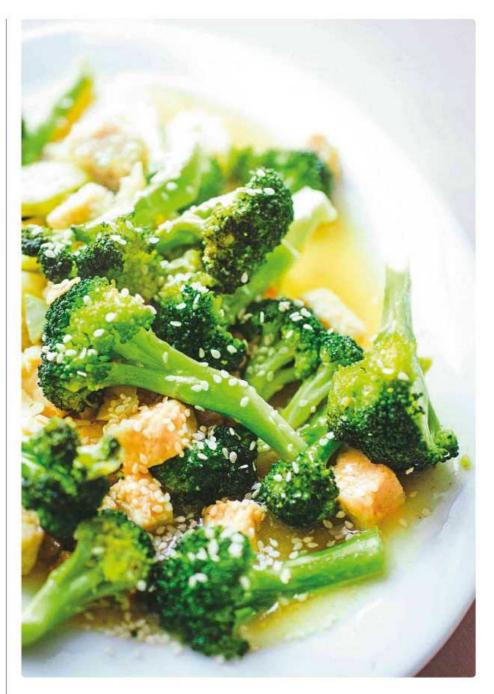
Quick, delicious & healthy

BROCCOLI PASTA WITH GARLIC & PINE NUTS

Whip up this fresh pasta dish in under 30 minutes, perfect for a busy weekday.

SERVES 4

- 2 broccoli heads, cut into florets
- 50ml extra virgin olive oil, plus 4 tablespoons to serve
- 5-6 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- ½ chilli, chopped
- 500g (1lb) fresh pasta
- 50g (2oz) pine nuts, toasted
- Handful of fresh basil leaves
- 60g (2oz) parmesan cheese, grated
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1. Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil, add the broccoli and simmer for 3-5 minutes.
- 2. Meanwhile, heat the olive oil in a separate pan and gently cook the garlic and chilli for three minutes or until the garlic is golden brown.
- 3. When the broccoli florets are tender, scoop them out of the water with a slotted spoon and add to the pan with the garlic and chilli along with 120ml (4fl oz) of the broccoli cooking water. Using the back of a fork, roughly mash the broccoli with the garlic to form a coarse purée. Add the basil leaves, mixing in.
- 4. Cook the fresh pasta according to the packet instructions until al dente. Once cooked, drain and tip into a large serving bowl. Top with the broccoli mixture and drizzle over the extra olive oil. Scatter the pine nuts over and season with freshly ground black pepper.
- 5. Serve with grated Parmesan cheese.



BROCCOLI & LEMON CHICKEN

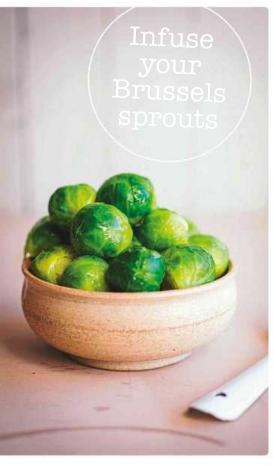
Serve up this vibrant, oriental-inspired dish of broccoli, tender chicken and a zesty lemon sauce.

SERVES 4

- 1 tbsp sunflower oil or olive oil
- 340g (12oz) pack of organic chicken breast, cut into strips
- 3 garlic cloves, sliced
- 2 heads of broccoli or 350g (12oz) tender stem broccoli
- 300ml (10fl oz) organic chicken stock
- 2 heaped tsp cornflour
- 2 tbsp runny honey
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 lemon, zest and juice of
- A large handful of roasted cashews
- 2 tbsp sesame seeds

- 1. Heat the oil in a wok or large frying pan. Add the chicken and fry for 3-4 minutes until golden.
- **2.** Add the garlic and broccoli. Stir fry for a few minutes.
- **3.** Mix the stock with the cornflour, sugar and honey, then pour into the wok and stir until thickened.
- **4.** Add the lemon zest and juice, and cashew nuts.
- **5.** Add the sesame seeds, then serve with rice or noodles. ➤

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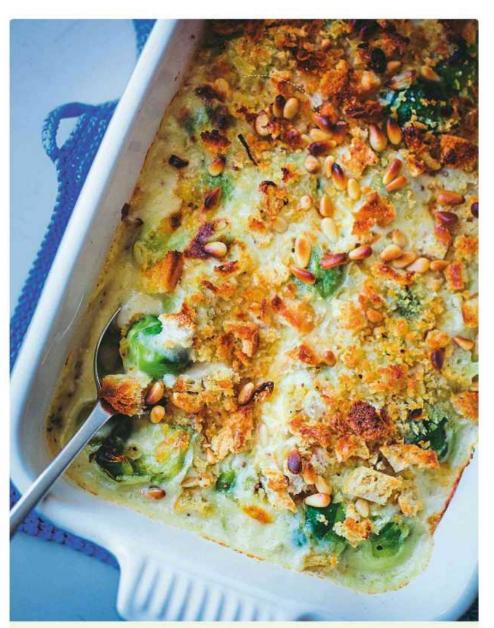


JUNIPER BERRY & SHALLOT SPROUTS

Aromatic juniper berries infuse this winter dish of shallots and Brussels sprouts.

SERVES 4

- 3 shallots, finely sliced
- 1 garlic clove, finely sliced
- 2 tsp juniper berries, roughly ground with a pestle and mortar
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 25g (1oz) butter
- 500g (1lb) Brussels sprouts
- 300ml (10fl oz) vegetable stock
- 1. In a large frying pan, gently cook the shallots, garlic and juniper in the oil and half the butter until soft and golden, roughly seven minutes.
- 2. Add the sprouts and stock and simmer for 10 minutes until the sprouts are just tender. Stir in the remaining butter, season with salt and pepper, then serve.



BRUSSELS SPROUT & CHEESE BAKE WITH CRISPY SHALLOTS

Who can say no to a cheesy bake? A comforting and warming dish, perfect for the colder months.

SERVES 4

- 500g (1lb) Brussels sprouts
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 4 shallots, thinly sliced
- 85g (3oz) fresh breadcrumbs
- 25g (1oz) butter
- 400ml (14fl oz) milk
- 50g (2oz) plain flour
- 2 tsp wholegrain mustard
- 100g (3½oz) cheddar, grated
- 30g (1oz) pine nuts

- 1. Heat oven to 200°C/180°C fan/gas 6.
- 2. Halve any large sprouts and toss them with the oil and some seasoning in a roasting tin or ovenproof dish. Roast for 20 minutes until the sprouts are tender and turning golden.
- 3. Meanwhile, put the shallots in a frying pan and place over a medium-low heat. Gently fry until crispy. Remove from the pan with a slotted spoon. Add the breadcrumbs and fry until golden and crunchy. Set aside, then clean the pan with kitchen paper.
- 4. Melt the butter in the pan with 2 tbsp of the milk, then stir in the flour and mustard for two minutes to make a paste. Gradually whisk in remaining milk, until you have a smooth sauce.
- 5. Cook until you have a thick sauce, then turn off the heat and stir in the cheese until melted. Taste and season with salt and pepper.
- 6. Tip the sprouts and shallots into an oven-proof dish, then spoon over the sauce and scatter on the breadcrumbs and pine nuts.
- 7. Bake gratin for 10-15 minutes until bubbling. Serve.





It's good to have a gluten-free recipe up your sleeve should you need one. This warm and sticky cake tastes great with a dollop of clotted cream on the side.

SERVES 6

- 150g (5oz) unsalted butter, softened
- 125g (4oz) golden caster sugar
- 2 medium eggs
- 75g (2½oz) gluten-free self-raising flour
- 75g (2½oz) ground almonds

FOR THE CARAMELISED PEARS:

- 3 firm pears
- 25g (1oz) unsalted butter
- 3 tbsp soft brown sugar
- a pinch of salt

- 1. Preheat the oven to 170°C/gas 3. Grease a 20cm-diameter springform cake tin and line the base with baking parchment.
- 2. Peel, core and quarter the pears. Melt the 25g (1oz) butter in a large frying pan over a medium high heat. When it's bubbling, add the brown sugar and stir gently until it has dissolved into the butter. Add the pears and cook gently for 5-10 minutes. Set aside to cool.
- 3. In a mixing bowl, beat the butter with the caster sugar until pale and fluffy. Beat in one egg at a time, adding a spoonful of the flour with each to stop the mix curdling.
- **4.** Mix in the remaining flour, and the ground almonds.
- **5.** Scoop into the prepared tin. Arrange the pears on top and pour on any caramel left in the pan.
- **6.** Bake for 40-45 minutes or until a skewer inserted into the centre of the cake comes out clean.
- **7.** Leave in the tin to cool on a wire rack, or serve warm with cream.



PEAR & BRIE BRUSCHETTA

These little treats are fantastic to serve up for dinner guests, or at a party. Leave the skin on the pears for a vibrant-looking dish.

SERVES 4-6

- 250g (9oz) brie, cut into slices
- 4 ripe pears
- 1 loaf of ciabatta
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- A few thyme sprigs
- A few walnuts to serve
- 1. Slice the ciabatta into 12 slices. Brush with a little olive oil, and place under the grill for 3-5 minutes, until golden and crisp.
- 2. Meanwhile, slice and core the pears.
- 3. Once the ciabatta slices are golden, place a slice of brie on each and top with the pear and thyme sprigs, then crush a few walnuts for the top. Serve warm.

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DIARY DATES

WHY NOT ENJOY A GARDENING SHOW, FESTIVAL OR ENROL ON A COURSE?

FRUIT PRUNING COURSES

FRUIT PRUNING MADE EASY JANUARY 6. Waterperry Gardens, near Wheatley, Oxfordshire. Suitable for beginners. 10am-3.30pm. Book on 01844 339254 www.waterperrygardens.co.uk PRACTICAL PRUNING JANUARY 13. Ryton Organic Gardens, Wolston Lane, near Coventry. Introduction to pruning (including fruit). 9.30am-1pm. Book on 02476 303517 www. gardenorganic.org.uk PRUNING OLD FRUIT TREES JANUARY 16-17. Brighton and Lewes, East Sussex. How to improve a tree's health and productivity, two-day practical course in different orchards. 10am-5pm. Book on 07746 185927 www. brightonpermaculture.org.uk TRADITIONAL ORCHARD **MANAGEMENT JANUARY 20.** Thornhayes Nursery, Dulford, Cullompton, Devon. Pruning and managing standard and halfstandard orchards. 9.30am-3pm. Book on 01884 266746 www. thornhayes-nursery.co.uk



Learn to graft your own apple tree



Potato days provide dozens of varieties to choose from in quantities large or small

WINTER FRUIT PRUNING JANUARY 20. East Malling Research, Kent. Covers apples, pears, plums and cherries. 9.30am-3.30pm. Book on 01732 523755 www.emr.ac.uk/ shortcourses

APPLE PRUNING JANUARY 21 OR 27. RHS Garden Rosemoor, Great Torrington, Devon. Practical demonstration of formation pruning and pruning established trees. 11am-12.30pm. 01805 624067 www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/rosemoor **ONE-DAY WINTER FRUIT PRUNING** JANUARY 23. Brogdale Farm, Faversham, Kent. Comprehensive introduction, theory and practical. 10am-4pm. Book on 01795 536250 www.brogdalecollections.org FRUIT PRUNING WORKSHOP JANUARY 27. Waterperry Gardens, near Wheatley, Oxfordshire. Apple and pear pruning, for those that know the basics. 10am-3.30pm. Book on 01844 339254 www.waterperrygardens.co.uk

PLEASE NOTE

We have made every effort to ensure these details were correct at the time of going to press, but recommend you check with the organisers before travelling

VEG GROWING

GROWING ORGANIC SPUDS

JANUARY 20. Ryton Organic Gardens, Wolston Lane, near Coventry. Soil, varieties, P&D control. 10am-4pm. Book on 02476 303517 www. gardenorganic.org.uk STORY OF THE POTATO AND OTHER TUBERS FEBRUARY 9. RHS Centre, Pershore College, Worcestershire. Talk, 2-4pm. Book on 01386 554609 rhs@ warwickshire.ac.uk PLANNING YOUR ORGANIC GARDEN FEBRUARY 10. Ryton Organic Gardens, Wolston Lane, near Coventry. How to get started on vegetable growing. 10am-4pm. Book on 02476 303517 www.gardenorganic.org.uk **GET GROWING FEBRUARY 12** OR 27. River Cottage HQ, Park Farm, nr Axminster, Devon. Learn how to grow your own organic fruit and veg. 9.30am-5pm. 01297 630300, www. rivercottage.net STARTING FROM SCRATCH WITH YOUR VEGETABLE GARDEN FEBRUARY 23. RHS Centre, Pershore College, Worcestershire. Talk, 2-4pm. Book on 01386

554609 rhs@warwickshire.ac.uk

FRUIT GRAFTING

FRUIT TREE GRAFTING JANUARY 23 OR FEBRUARY 13. Brogdale Farm, Faversham, Kent. Grafting to produce maiden trees and to change varieties on mature trees. 10am-1pm. Book on 01795 536250 www. brogdalecollections.org APPLE GRAFTING WEEKEND FEBRUARY 20 & 21. Cothele, St Dominick, near Saltash, Cornwall. Weekend of grafting workshops using local apple varieties. 11am-4pm. No need to book, more info 01579 351346 www.nationaltrust.org.uk/ cotehele

SHOWS AND FESTIVALS

RHS EARLY SPRING PLANT
FAIR FEBRUARY 16 & 17. RHS
Lawrence Hall, London SW1.
Includes wide variety of seed
potatoes and onion sets to buy,
tips and advice. www.rhs.org.uk/
shows-events
WAKEFIELD RHUBARB FESTIVAL
FEBRUARY 19-21. Cathedral
Precinct, Wakefield, West
Yorkshire. Visits to rhubarb
growers, cookery, tastings,
tours. 10am-4pm. www.
experiencewakefield.co.uk



Pruned apple trees at Brogdale National Fruit Collection

POTATO DAYS

BRISTOL POTATO DAY & SEED FAIR JANUARY 10. Southville Centre, Beauley Road, Southville, Bristol. Potatoes, seeds, sets, fruit, talks. 10am-2pm. 01749 860039 www. pennardplants.com SWINDON POTATO DAY JANUARY 16. Gorse Hill Community Centre, Chapel Street, Swindon. Potatoes, seeds, sets, fruit - organised by Swindon Allotment Society. 10.30am-2pm. www.salga.org.uk PEWSEY POTATO DAY JANUARY 17. Bouverie Hall, Pewsey, Wiltshire. Potatoes, seeds, sets, fruit organised by Pewsey Vale Garden Club. 10am-2pm. 01749 860039 www.pennardplants.com THE GREAT GLOUCESTERSHIRE POTATO WEEKEND JANUARY 16-17. Dundry Nurseries, Bamfurlong Lane, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire. Nearly 200 potato varieties, expert advice, other stalls. 9am-4.30pm. 01452 713124 www.dundrynurseries.co.uk RUSLAND POTATO DAY JANUARY 17. Greenodd Village Hall, near Ulverston, Cumbria. Organised by Rusland Valley Horticultural Society. 10am-3pm. jeaniewilk@ktdinternet.com MARSHFIELD POTATO DAY JANUARY 23. Marshfield Community Centre, The Hayfield, Marshfield, Gloucestershire. Potatoes, seeds, sets, fruit - organised by Marshfield Gardening Association. 10am-2pm. 01749 860039 www. pennardplants.com

BLANDFORD POTATO DAY JANUARY 24. Pimperne Village Hall, near Blandford, Dorset. Potatoes, heritage seeds and other stalls - organised by Blandford Museum Victorian Garden Club. 10am-2pm. www. blandfordtownmuseum.org LOUGHBOROUGH POTATO DAY JANUARY 30. Loughborough Town Centre. Pre-order for discount prices. 9am-mid afternoon. www.transitionloughborough. wordpress.com **CHESTERFIELD POTATO DAY** JANUARY 30. Pavements Shopping Centre, Chesterfield. Pre-order for discount prices. 10am-2pm. www.transitionchesterfield.org.uk **DURHAM POTATO DAY JANUARY** 30. Bowburn Community Centre, County Durham. Around 16 potato varieties, advice. Organised by Durham Organic Gardeners. 10am-1pm. www.doga.org.uk SKELMERSDALE POTATO DAY JANUARY 30. Concourse Shopping Centre, Skelmersdale, Lancashire. West Lancashire Allotment Federation. 10am-3pm. www.wlaf.btck.co.uk URCHFONT POTATO DAY JANUARY 30. Urchfont Village Hall, nr Devizes, Wiltshire. Potatoes, seeds, sets, fruit - organised by Urchfont Garden Society.10am-1pm. 01749 860039 www.pennardplants.com **MACCLESFIELD POTATO DAY** JANUARY 31. Town Hall, Market Place, Macclesfield. 80+ potato varieties, seeds, sets, fruit. 10am-3.30pm.

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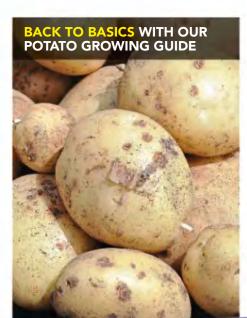
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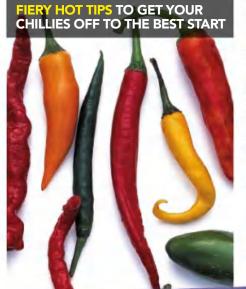
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NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS ON THE PLOT

We asked some of our contributors what their growing resolutions were for 2016. Here's what they told us. Find us on Facebook and reveal yours **KitchenGardenMag**

BEN VANHEEMS

I'm going to make more of an effort to attract beneficial insects into my plot. I'll be putting up some more bug hotels for solitary bees; letting the nettles establish around my compost heap to give ladybirds somewhere to lay their eggs; and sowing more annual flowers at the ends of my veg beds to tempt in the pollinators – and nourish the soul!

BOB FLOWERDEW

Having seen a huge benefit from an unplanned load of muck I resolve to get some more. Also I grow much larger, cleaner fruits and vegetables by heavy thinning removing the congested, ugly and infested so the rest swell more.

I was even more ruthless with my fruit and shoot thinning last year and had some superlative fruits, so will do so again this year.



GABY BARTAI

I think 2016 is going to be the year of the lettuce. My Glasgow garden (heavy clay soil, limited sunshine, high rainfall) breeds snails in biblical numbers. I've had little time for snail patrol, so I've fallen into the habit of just growing what the snails won't

eat. Enough: this year, I'm going to find an organic snail solution that actually works, and grow salads and courgettes again.



Zak the snail, back in Gaby's garden a year after being ID'd with Tipp-Ex and then rehomed down the road!

CHARLES DOWDING

My resolution could be to use the process of making a garden plan to weigh up my options of how much to grow, of each different vegetable, after assessing yields this year and which veg I could do with more or less of. Plans are a starting point only; they always change but give a clear idea of what I want to grow where.

SUE STICKLAND

'A stitch in time saves nine' and that is never truer than in my garden. For example, putting my fruit nets on in time could save me work, by making sure none of the good fruit is eaten by birds. The redcurrants are most at risk – the

blackbirds move in just as soon as the berries show a hint of red. I'm determined all my fruit will be punctually bird proofed!



STEVE OTT

For me it's the old chestnut of remembering to make those successional sowings. After all these years I'm still guilty of sitting back after the initial frenzy of making all those first spring sowings and simply watching them grow without paying attention to what to replace them with. I guess it all comes down to practising what I preach!

ANNE SWITHINBANK

I'm always experimenting with varieties and sowing dates but don't always write everything down. Sometimes I mean to write a label but only remember it three months later when I'm racking my brain to remember what variety of

French bean and when did I sow it? This year, my resolution is better labelling, bigger labels and writing everything in a stock book.



JOYCE RUSSELL

I resolve to get my loganberry patch under control. The plants have flopped and grown enormous shoots to spread in all directions. I will put on gloves and brave the thorns and I will do much more than a little pruning...

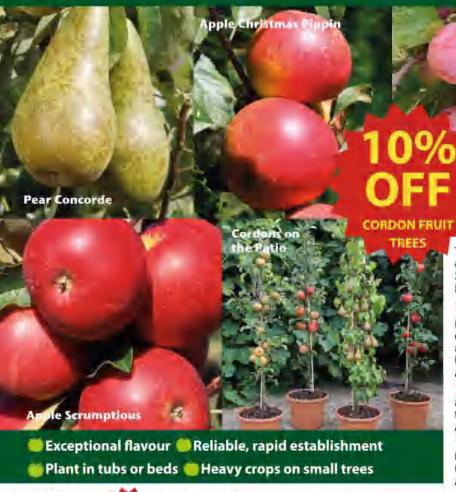
I will, I really will. I'm sure by the end of 2016 I'll have given these plants the care they deserve in return for the delicious fruits.



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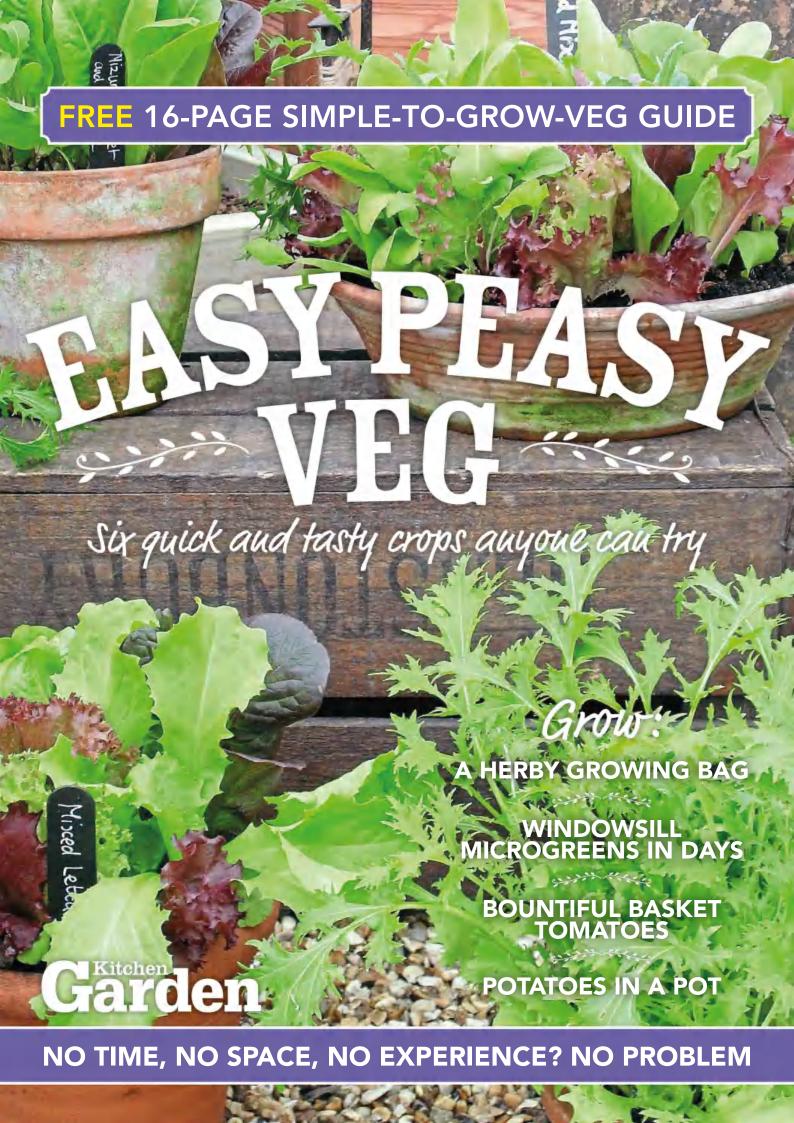
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Welcowe

If you are new to growing vegetables or an old hand we hope this little guide will encourage you to try a few things that are easy and quick to grow. When you first start growing veg it can sometimes be quite daunting with a huge amount of information at your fingertips. Although this is great, it can also be quite confusing. It helps to just start with some simple growing ideas and techniques and once you've had some

techniques and once you've had some success with these it will give you the confidence to try more crops.

Happy veg growing.

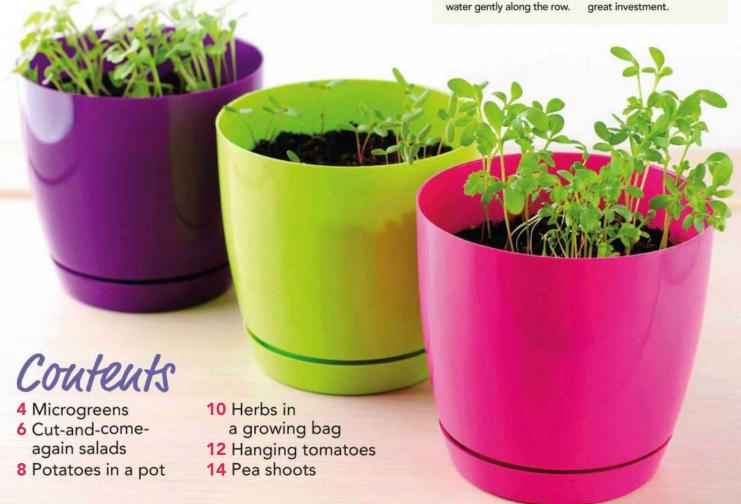
TOP TIPS FOR FIRST TIME VEGETABLE GROWERS

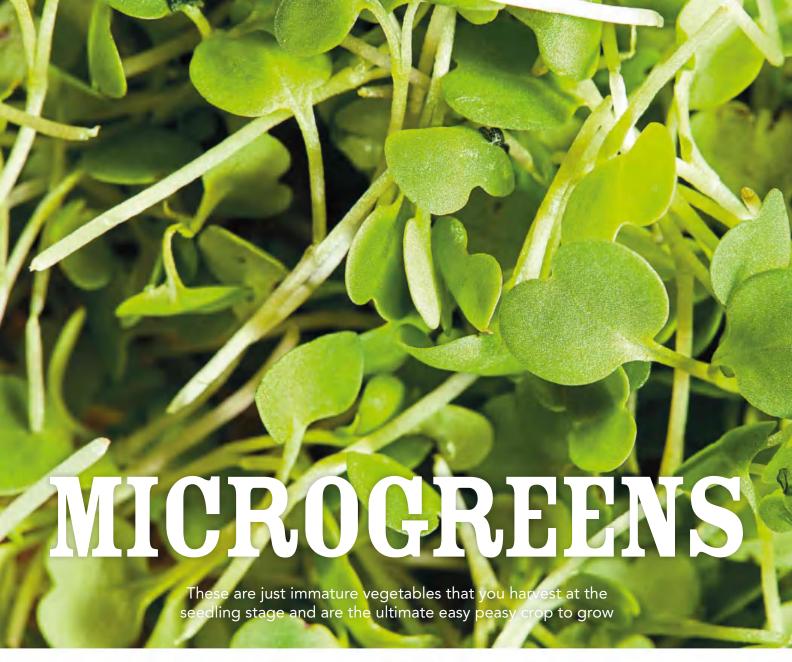
- Start with a few containers or a small patch of ground.
- Tend only a small patch of earth first. You could even try a Mr Fothergill's Gromat that is a self sown mat of different veg seeds or salad mix. This will create instant well spaced mini rows of vegetables or salad leaves. (www.mr-fothergills.co.uk)

 If sowing outdoors and the weather is dry for a few

days after sowing, dribble

- Thin the seedlings as soon as possible. If the row is sown too thickly the seedlings compete for water and nutrients and space and it will drastically affect the success of the crop. Always keep a little space between seedlings.
- If you are having problems with pests consider investing in fleece or the very fine netting called Veggiemesh or Enviromesh. Cover all vulnerable crops from sowing. It can be reused and lasts for years so is a great investment.





he young shoots are particularly nutritious and often with a flavour of the more mature crop but sometimes sweeter. You can be harvesting in as little as a week or two after sowing which is the real beauty of this crop.

WHAT YOU NEED

All you need are the seeds, compost and a container. The seeds can be any vegetables with just a few exceptions (see below). The compost can be multi-purpose compost or you could use perlite or vermiculite.

WHAT TO BUY

You can use up most leftover packets of seed (avoid tomato, pepper and parsnip seed) to produce microgreens. Examples of leaves ideal for this culture include: mizuna, cabbage, kale, kohl rabi, rocket, amaranth, radish, coriander, beet, basil, mustard, lettuce, cress, chard, Chinese cabbage, shungiku, parsley, carrot, fennel, fenugreek, leek, spinach.

Some kits are now available which provide everything you need to create a little crop of microgreens. Suttons sell kits that come with a shallow tray and a special mat on which to germinate the seeds. Check out good garden centres for these.

WHEN TO GROW

Microgreens can be grown at any time of year on a windowsill. The crops are not grown beyond seedling stage and so you don't need a lot of space and it doesn't matter if light levels are low which they are in the depths of winter. If growing in late autumn through winter and early spring then they will need a bit of warmth to help the seeds germinate. From March to October microgreens could be grown in pots outside on the patio or in an unheated greenhouse or mini greenhouse or cloche.

Top tip

If sowing in a large pot or trough consider filling the bottom half with some broken up bits of polystyrene and then add just 5cm (2in) of compost and sow. You are not growing a long term crop so this amount of compost will suffice

HARVESTING

After about 10-14 days when the seedlings are only 2½cm-5cm (1-2in) you can start to harvest. This is done either by cutting the tops off with scissors or you could carefully pull up a few whole plants and snip off the root. This can give you a longer shoot and if done carefully it can mean the other seedlings can be left to grow on a bit.





USING MICROGREENS

Microgreens can be used in sandwiches or dropped into stir fries at the last minute or simply be used to garnish any dishes to give a slightly fresh zingy taste packed with vitamins and minerals.



STEP BY STEP GROWING MICROGREENS







- 1 Take a container, compost and seeds and some labels. This is a trough which is useful but not essential as a more shallow container will suffice. Fill the container with your growing medium and gently firm the compost. Keep the outer pack or make a label to identify your seedlings.
- 2 Sprinkle over the seeds. You can mix some seeds before sowing or sow half of the tray with one type of seed and the other half with another. The seed can be sown quite thickly for microgreens so aim for approximately 3-5mm between seeds.





The young seedlings should be ready to harvest after just a week or so

- 3 After sowing cover the seeds with a light coating of compost. Water well either using a fine rose on a watering can or place the container into another container with a little water in the bottom to allow water to rise up gradually through the holes in the base to wet the compost evenly.
- 4 If sowing in spring through summer and into autumn you could place the container in a mini greenhouse that sits near your back door. This will give some heat and protection yet makes them convenient to harvest for the kitchen. Alternatively, place the container on a windowsill.





ost of our popular salads have a neat trick that you can take advantage of. If you snip off the top growth (or pick individual leaves) when large enough, leaving the growing point attached, the plants will regrow allowing you to harvest them 2-3 times before they run out of steam and have to be resown. And that is just what cut-and-come-again Sow a batch of crops are - plants that can seeds every 14-21

This is a great way to produce all your salad needs in a very small space and it allows you to grow such a wide variety of leaves, all with different flavours, in one small tray.

be cut, or harvested,

more than once.

They can be grown anywhere that offers a little protection during the cooler months, but outside too from March to September, or you can simply grow them on a reasonably bright windowsill.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

■ A suitable tray such as a windowbox-sized container or you can use pots or seed trays. If growing on the windowsill, you will need

a suitable tray or saucer to catch

excess water. A cover of some sort for the tray, such as a propagator lid or cling film, is useful but not essential.

- Compost this can be the cheapest you can find such as growing bag compost or bargain multi-purpose. Salad seeds are not fussy about compost requirements.
- Last but not least seeds. See 'Suitable For Salads' opposite for a list. There is no reason why you can't use up seeds left over at the end of the season for cut-and-come-again crops.

WHEN TO GROW

days to eusure

a continuous

supply

You can grow cut-and-come-again salads all year round, but they will grow far slower in the winter. In summer you can be harvesting within



STEP BY STEP

SOWING A CUT-AND-COME-AGAIN CROP









- 1 Fill container with compost. If it is deep, fill just three-quarters full to save compost. Sieve a little soil over the top.
- 2 Water the compost thoroughly. You can do this with a fine rose sprayer, or stand the tray in water and allow to soak until the surface is thoroughly moistened.
- 3 Sow your seeds thinly. Sowing thickly may result in overcrowding and could encourage rotting or 'running to seed' (bolting).
- 4 Water lightly over the surface of the compost and cover the tray to maintain humidity until the seeds have germinated and about 70% have established.

as little as three weeks from sowing. In winter it may take eight weeks or more.

SUITABLE FOR SALADS

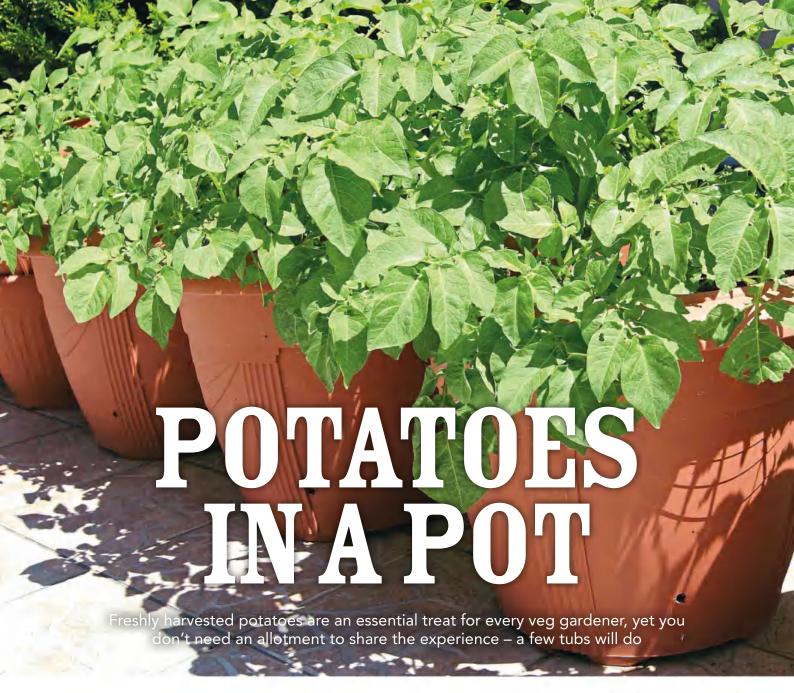
Lettuce, mustards, oriental greens such as mibuna, mizuna and pak choi, kale, chard, peas (for shoots, see page 14), beetroot, perpetual beet, radicchio, onions, endive, radish, watercress, claytonia, lamb's lettuce. Also some herbs such as coriander, basil, parsley and chives. Seed catalogues also offer a wide range of themed seed mixtures especially for this purpose, or you can buy the seeds separately and experiment with your own flavours.

Not suitable: The foliage of members of the tomato family – tomatoes, peppers, aubergines – must never be eaten.

WATCH OUT FOR

If growing outside, slugs and flea beetles can be a nuisance with some crops. Take precautions against slugs and snails and cover trays with crop protection fleece to keep off beetles and other pests such as greenfly.





otatoes might seem difficult for someone starting out on the growing adventure but they're not that difficult at all. A bit of basic know-how, the right materials, a little attention along the way and you should be able to produce a tasty crop of new potatoes as fresh as can be.

You might think that to grow potatoes you need a lot of space but this is not the case. You can grow potatoes in pots, sacks, bags, tyres – indeed, in all sorts of containers – and in all sorts of places too, including small backyards, patios, balconies, and even on top of a barge.

The minimum size realistically for a container should be 30cm (1ft) deep and 30cm (1ft) in diameter.

WHAT TO BUY

To grow potatoes you will need to buy 'seed' potatoes ('tubers') which are available online or from garden centres. There are many varieties of potato but they can be broken down into three categories. 'First

early' varieties take about 10 weeks to mature, 'second early' varieties take about 14 weeks, and 'maincrop' take 20 weeks.

Although you can grow maincrop in containers, it's probably wiser to opt for a first early or second early variety which will give you 'new' potatoes in late spring/early summer. When you come to buy your seed potatoes the label will indicate whether they are first early, second early or maincrop, and also the name of the specific variety, such as 'Home Guard'.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

■ Egg box or seed tray

Take an empty

compost bag, turn it

iuside out and voila!

A potato growing

bag for free!

- Seed potatoes
 - Container (8 litre)
 - Multi-purpose compost
 - Fertiliser

WHEN TO GROW

You should plant first
earlies towards the end of
March, second earlies midApril, and maincrop mid to
late April.

PREPARING FOR PLANTING

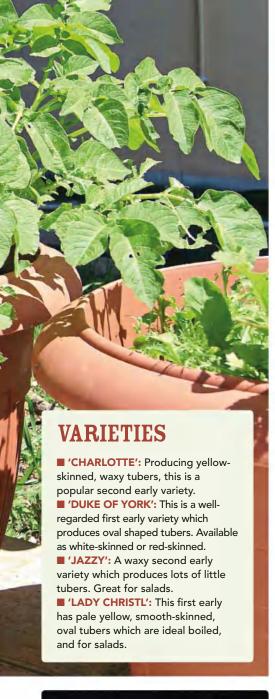
Prior to planting it's a good idea to 'chit' your seed potatoes first. This simply means encouraging them to sprout ('chitting' means sprouting). When you look at your seed potatoes closely you will see that they have little indentations known as 'eyes' and it is from these that sprouts will rise. Chitting gives your potatoes a head start and results in an earlier crop.

WATCH OUT FOR

FROST: If your potato haulms (the stems and foliage) are hit by frost they will blacken and turn mushy. If there is a risk of frost, either bring your containers inside or cover them with horticultural fleece (available online and from garden centres) or spare bubble wrap.

LEGGY SPROUTING: If your chitting seed potatoes start send up very spindly shoots it's probably due to lack of light or the conditions are too warm.

VIRUSES: Potatoes can suffer from a range of these, where the leaves will curl and or where they will take on a mottled appearance. Watch out for aphids which carry viruses and spray with an insecticide if necessary.



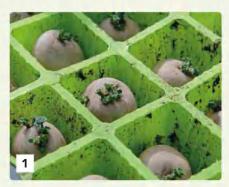
Iu the Kitcheu

BUTTERED NEW POTATOES WITH PARSLEY: Sometimes simple is best. Just boil the potatoes. Then melt butter in pan, add chopped French parsley and then pour over potatoes. Salt and pepper to taste.



STEP BY STEP

GROWING POTATOES IN CONTAINERS







How many seed potatoes you grow will depend on the size of your container. The method that follows is the simplest, using a 48 (H) \times 30 \times 30cm (18 \times 12 \times 12in) potato bag (available online and from garden centres) and one seed potato.

1. CHITTING

In late January place seed potatoes in an egg box, seed tray or modular seed tray with some of the eyes facing upwards. Place in a cool, light, frost-free place. After about six weeks, when the shoots are about 2.5cm (1in) long, they are ready for planting.

2. ADDING THE BOTTOM LAYER

Create a 15cm (6in) layer of compost to the bottom of the container and mix in some potato fertiliser according to the instructions on the box. This will form the basic bed for your seed potato.





3. PLANT THE SEED POTATO

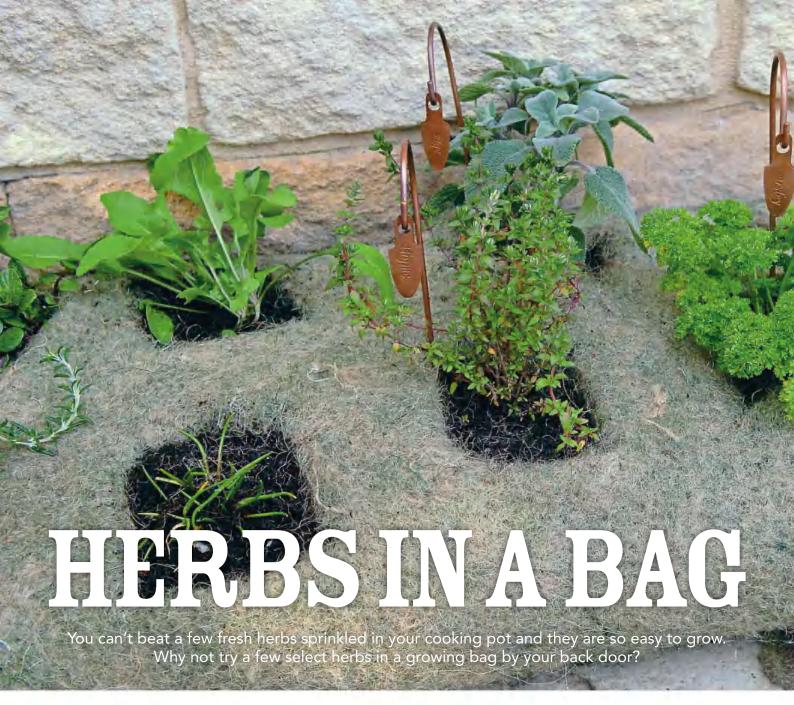
Place the seed potato in the centre of the bed with its shoots pointing upwards, and then cover with another 15cm (6in) layer of compost. Water in, and continue to water regularly – don't let the compost dry out.

4. EARTHING UP

After a couple of weeks you will see foliage emerging. Cover the emerging leaves with more compost, though allow a few to peep through. Continue to do this until the compost has reached the top of the container. Continue to water and add a liquid fertiliser every two weeks.

5. FLOWERING

First and second earlies are usually ready when they flower. To harvest, simply turn the container on its side and pull on the stems, dragging the tubers out with them. Then turn the whole container upside down to access the rest of the tubers.



resh, young herbs give a powerful punch to your cooking and are so much better than dried herbs. Herbs also need to be handy and this herby growing bag is ideal to place by your back door.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- A growing bag
- About 1-2m (39in-78in) of hanging basket liner (cut off a roll from a garden centre) or hessian
- About 8-9 small pots (3½in/9cm) of herbs of your choice



WHEN TO GROW

Ideally start this herby bag in the spring but it can be planted up later during the summer months too.

HARVESTING

You can pluck a few leaves off almost straight away although be careful not to defoliate the plant. Allow it to establish and grow a bit ideally. You only need a very small amount of fresh leaf to add excellent flavour to your cooking.

WATCH OUT FOR

Take note of the labels when you plant up your herbs. Does it say annual or perennial on the label? If annual then at the end of the growing season they will start to die back so lift and dispose of these. Examples include basil and to some extent parsley and coriander. More hardy perennial herbs such as rosemary, sage and thyme can be left for another year in the growing bag if you apply a controlled-release fertiliser in the spring. After a couple of seasons you will need to lift these and repot individually into larger pots of fresh compost or plant out in the garden.

Top tip

Every week in the summer check how dry the compost is and water if necessary. A general purpose liquid feed will also be beneficial every couple of weeks

GREAT HERBS FOR GROWING BAGS

Most popular herbs will grow well in your growing bag, such as: basil, thyme, coriander, parsley (flat and curly-leaved), chives, sage, rosemary and mint.





STEP BY STEP MAKING A HERBY BAG





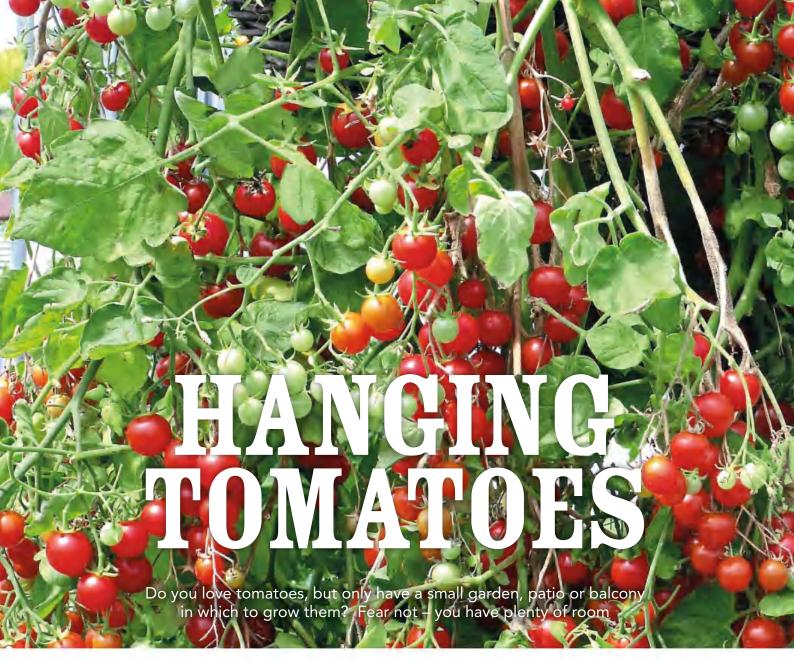








- 1 First plump up the growing bag to break up the compost inside and then make about 10 holes in the base of the bag.
- 2 Turn the bag the right way up and wrap with the hanging basket liner or hessian. Tuck the ends in and place by your back door.
- 3 Cut crosses through the material and the growing bag with scissors. Make sure you get them evenly apart across the bag. Fold the flaps under to form a planting space.
- **4** Remove some of the compost from the space and place in a bucket. Take the herbs out of their pots and plant into the holes you have made. Return some of the compost. Gently trickle a little water around the rootball and then firm lightly.
- **5** Brush off excess compost that may have spilled over the bag and then water the bag thoroughly. Label the plants and enjoy.



ne of the easiest and most attractive ways of growing this delicious and versatile crop is in hanging baskets and with modern F1 hybrid cherry tomatoes, you will be amazed at just how many small, sweet fruit you can harvest from such a small space.

Producing heavy crops does however require plenty of food and water and so it is important to choose a larger basket – 45cm (18in) diameter is ideal – so that it will hold a reasonable volume of compost for the hungry roots. You will also need a good compost and it is also a good idea to add a controlled release fertiliser to this prior to planting up

'Tumbler'

or to push some fertiliser 'tablets' into the compost after planting. These should feed your plants for the rest of the season. However, if you prefer to have more control over this aspect, use a liquid tomato feed instead, adding it at half strength every watering once the first truss of fruit has set on your plants.

As with many other fruiting crops, to get the best from them it is important to harvest regularly to ensure the development and ripening of the following fruits, but with care your hanging basket should provide you with fruit from late June/July to the end of September.



WHAT YOU NEED

- A hanging basket the bigger the better, but a 45cm (18in) diameter one is ideal. This can be a solid plastic basket or open wire type. If using the latter you will need something to line it with such as moss or moss substitute or a paper or fibre liner. If you are often away from home a self-watering basket (one with a built-in reservoir) might be a good option.
- A good, fresh multi-purpose or potting compost is ideal. Avoid loam-based mixes such as John Innes as these are too heavy for a large basket.
- Controlled-release fertiliser or good liquid tomato food.
- Water-retaining gel this is optional, but again a good idea for those who struggle to find the time to give their basket enough water during the summer.
- Tomato plants. You can grow these yourself (and you'll find all the advice you need in the January 2016 issue of *KG*) or buy them from your local garden centre or a young plant specialist. See our 'Best for baskets' panel opposite for some of our favourite basket varieties.
- A strong bracket to hang the basket from, preferably near the house to make it easy to pop out to pick a few fruit.

BEST FOR BASKETS ■ 'HUNDREDS AND THOUSANDS' (Suttons) ■ 'TUMBLER' (D T Brown) **■ 'TUMBLING TOM'** (Suttons, T&M, Marshalls, D T Brown) **■** 'MASKOTKA' (T&M, Simpsons Seeds) ■ 'CHERRY CASCADE' (T&M) **■ 'GARDEN PEARL'** (Kings) **■ 'LIZZANO F1'** (T&M, Simpsons Seeds) 'CHERRY FOUNTAIN' (Seeds of Distinction) ■ 'CHERRY FALLS' (D T Brown)

WHEN TO GROW

If sowing your own seeds, this can be done from January to March. If you intend to grow your basket outside, March is ideal as plants are not frost hardy and can't be moved outdoors until June in most parts of the country, so you don't want to sow too early. If buying plants and you have somewhere frost free to keep them, then pick them up in April. If not, then buy them in May/June and plant up your baskets straight away.

WATCH OUT FOR

Never allow your plants to wilt as this will check their growth and may lead to reduced cropping. Yellow leaves may indicate that additional feeding is required. Whitefly can be a nuisance in summer, but can be tolerated.



Add controlled-release fertiliser to the compost

STEP BY STEP

PLANTING A TOMATO BASKET



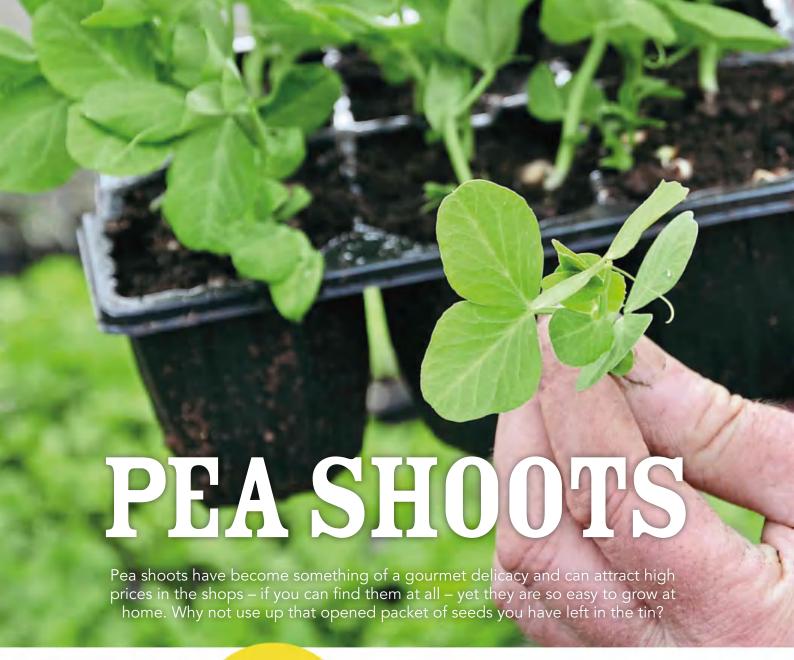






- 1 Remove the chain and stand your basket on a large pot to help hold it steady. Line the basket using the material of your choice. We have used moss.
- 2 If using an open wire basket place a plant saucer or piece of polythene in the base. This will slow the flow of water through the compost a little. Fill about three-quarters full with compost.
- 3 Put in your plants. In a 45cm (18in) basket you will need three plants. In a 30cm (12in) basket you will only really need one plant.
- 4 Water thoroughly. You can do this with a watering can or, if using an open wire basket, by standing the basket in a water-filled bucket until the surface of the compost is soaked.





resh, young pea shoots give you all the taste of fresh peas, but without the hassle of preparing soil, installing supports, watering and weeding. What is more, they can be ready to harvest in less than a month and can be cropped at least three times.

Top tip

Pick regularly to
enjoy the shoots
when young and
tender

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- A pot or container from 13cm (5in) upwards.
- Any multi-purpose or growing bag compost.
- Some pea seeds.

WHEN TO GROW

Sow your pea seeds all year round.

As with all crops they will grow more slowly in winter than summer, but given a warm, bright windowsill in winter these dry green seeds will produce their delicious shoots within three to four weeks.

HARVESTING YOUR SHOOTS

Allow the shoots to produce two mature leaves before harvesting. Then pinch out the tips with your finger and thumbnail or snip with scissors, leaving the bottom two leaves behind. These will go on to pride new shoots in the joint between leaf and stem for a second and even a third harvest. See main picture.

WATCH OUT FOR

Your peas should remain pest and disease free, but shouldn't be overwatered or may suffer from stem rot. Watch out for greenfly and slugs in summer outdoors.

DID YOU KNOW?

Pea shoots contain much of the goodness of freshly harvested peas. Only 50g contains half of our daily requirement of vitamin C and a quarter of our vitamin A. They also contain lots of folic acid and are low in fat, with just 9 calories per 50g of fresh shoots.





STEP BY STEP

SOWING PEAS FOR SHOOTS



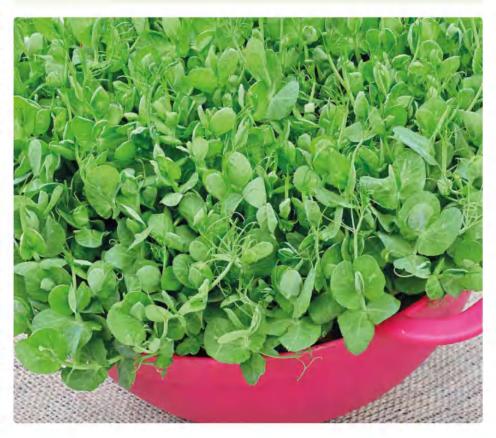






- 1 Fill your pot with any fresh multi-purpose compost or growing bag compost.
- 2 Sow your peas over the surface thickly so that they are almost touching.
- **3** Cover with some more compost, perlite or vermiculite (pictured) to the depth of the seed.
- 4 Water well to soak the compost, label and place the pot in a warm, light place to germinate.





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